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SHAKESPEARE

A PLAY IN FIVE EPISODES

SHAKESPEARE

A PLAY IN FIVE
EPISODES

BY
Harold Frederick RUBINSTEIN
AND
CLIFFORD BAX

WITH A PREFACE
BY
A. W. POLLARD

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TO
LINA

"All we know with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced as actor, and wrote poems and plays; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried."

STEEVENS.

"I dare to say that I know you as intimately as though I had been your closest fellow from youth upward. Your poems, your plays and your sonnets — I have read them with understanding."

"A YOUNG POET" (Episode V).

PREFATORY NOTE

A friend of the authors left a type-written copy of this play with me one evening, and as soon as he had gone I took it up and began to read. I didn't agree with it. I don't agree with it. Some of it made me very angry, very indignant. But when I had taken it up I read it through at a sitting, and I shouldn't have done that if it hadn't gripped me. I had been reading Shakespeare for half a century, and here were two young men cornering me and forcing me to do at last what I had always steadily refused to do—fall a-wondering what Shakespeare was really like. I had refused to do this, partly from a temperamental dislike of the insoluble, partly because I grew up amid a generation for whom Shelley's poetry was so largely spoilt by a discordant burden of "chatter about Harriet" that a reaction against all such chatter, more especially against that most abominable kind which is documented, argumentative, exegetical, and interminably long-winded, was almost necessarily provoked.

Chatter about the Dark Lady is a good deal worse than chatter about Harriet Westbrook, and I thank my stars that I have been compelled to read very little of it. Mr. Bax and Mr. Rubinstein cannot be accused of chattering. They have thought out their problem, their insoluble problem, and they present their view of it not argumentatively as a theory, but creatively in the five acts of a play. In fact, they have tried, perhaps consciously (they haven't told me), to do for Shakespeare what Mr. Drinkwater has done, with so large a measure of success, for Abraham Lincoln.

Mr. Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" was based on a mass of authentic evidence, and yet I have met

Americans who challenged its truth. Mr. Bax and Mr. Rubinstein have essayed a far harder task with much scantier and less trustworthy materials. Whatever the ultimate verdict on the play, their attempt must be reckoned a gallant adventure, carried out with a craftsmanship which commands respect. It is extraordinarily difficult to make Elizabethans talk without their talk jarring on the reader who has even a slight acquaintance with Elizabethan English as incongruous and impossible. The talk in this play very seldom jars. The stage management of the episodes is good, and often shows real imaginative power. If the jar comes, it will come from the characterisation; yet here also the authors show themselves good craftsmen, for their characterisation is consistent, all of a piece. If the first "episode" may be accepted as truly showing what Shakespeare was like in his early days as a playwright, the other episodes may be accepted. A belief that Shakespeare from first to last was more truly master of his own soul than is here shown may be my own contribution to the "idolatry" from which few lovers of his plays escape. Most of those who have written on him have found in him what they wished to find. If Mr. Bax and Mr. Rubinstein in their determination to overleap this weakness have fallen on the other side of the saddle, it is part of their adventure. In any case the adventure seems to me, as I have said, a gallant one. Coming after Mr. Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" it raises a hope that the English drama may escape from the monotony of artificial plots into the rich variety of human life by becoming biographical.

ALFRED W. POLLARD.

EPISODE I

1592

CHARACTERS

Philip Henslowe, *pawnbroker and theatrical adventurer.*
Christopher Marlowe, *the poet, aged* 28.
A Poor Man.
Joan Woodward, *step-daughter of Philip Henslowe.*
Edward Alleyne, *the actor.*
William Shakespeare, *actor and playwright, aged* 27.
The Dark Lady, *a maid-of-honour.*

EPISODE I

TIME: *September*, 1592.

SCENE: PHILIP HENSLOWE'S *business room at the Little Rose Estate, Southwark, in the Clink. Second-hand clothes hang here and there. Right, a door leading to the house. In front of this door, a counter, behind which stands* PHILIP HENSLOWE. *Before him,* KIT MARLOWE. *They are bargaining over a manuscript. Back left, a door into the street. From time to time sounds of hammering are heard without.*

MARLOWE. What, Master Henslowe! Surely you jest? I know well enough that of all the wares in the world there is none so poorly appraised as a poet's inventions: but, bethink you, even we poets must have money. Silver we need for wine; and for wenches—not silver but gold.

HENSLOWE. Then you'd best foreswear the wenches.

MARLOWE. Not I! Give me ten crowns and the play is yours.

HENSLOWE. I can do well enough without it. You shall have eight.

MARLOWE. Eight crowns for a tragedy in five acts ! Can we sing if we starve ? Answer me that.

HENSLOWE. Kit Marlowe, you hear those hammers ? That's my new playhouse a-building, and a pretty penny it costs me. If I were to pay you scribblers to the scale of your swollen vanity—why, man, there'd be plays and to spare but no playhouse.

MARLOWE. Ten crowns—for the love of learning !

HENSLOWE. Eight crowns, and see you deliver me the fifth act before the week turns. Your signature—come, you agree. [*Produces his day-book.*

MARLOWE. [*Hesitates a moment.*] A pen, a pen—and the devil take you !

[*He signs his name in the book.*

HENSLOWE. I've a mind not to pay . . .

MARLOWE. [*Snatching the book.*] Not to pay ?

HENSLOWE. Sh ! Until you deliver the fifth act. I know you, Kit Marlowe. So long as you can jingle a pair of shillings in your pocket you'll never pen a line.

MARLOWE. Give me the money. By my heart, you shall have the fifth act on Friday.

HENSLOWE. Keep clear of the syrens, then. Eight crowns. . . . [MARLOWE *gathers them up.*] Master Greene's at a bad pass, I hear.

MARLOWE. Greene ? Aye.

HENSLOWE. Yet *there* was a sweet breast, a man of true wit.

MARLOWE. You think so now, Master Henslowe, for you know that he'll never come here again to sell you his wit for a beggar's fee. A sad ruin you've made of him. Eight crowns !

HENSLOWE. Folk say he rails mightily against all his old companions.

MARLOWE. [*Turning to go.*] Poor Greene—starved into piety and repentance! Bah! It may be my turn to-morrow, but when the snuffer claps down on me there shall be no mumbling of prayers.

[A POOR MAN *has entered, left back, and is making his way to the counter. He carries a bundle.*

HENSLOWE. Well, well—God speed you, Kit!

MARLOWE. [*At the door, left.*] God me no Gods!

[*Exit, left.*

HENSLOWE. Now, Tom, what do *you* bring me? More of your trash?

POOR MAN. You shall see, Master Henslowe. [*Unpacking his parcel.*] Yon fellow, they do say, is a most notorious atheist.

HENSLOWE. Maybe. I care little for his opinions if he keeps them out of his plays.

POOR MAN. And what is his latest?

HENSLOWE. [*Chuckling.*] A rare piece, I'll promise you. [*Reading from the manuscript.*] "The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of King Edward the Second."

POOR MAN. [*Displaying his goods.*] Ah!

HENSLOWE. These? Trash, as I told you. Eight for you, Tom! Five for any other.

POOR MAN. Eight? I'll be packing. Why, the ruff is like new.

HENSLOWE. Say nine, then.

POOR MAN. Ten, or you miss your chance.

HENSLOWE. Ten crowns is a great sum.

POOR MAN. Not to you, Master Henslowe—not to a gentleman who can build a new playhouse. And how goes the building?

HENSLOWE. Slowly enough. The lousy rascals must be watched like a pack of schoolboys.

POOR MAN. There should be a deal of money in your playhouses. . . .

HENSLOWE. [*Throwing the goods under the counter.*] Here, Tom—here are your ten; but I give 'em rather for your good than your goods.

POOR MAN. Thank ye, Master Henslowe. As I was saying, if you find any post in your new playhouse for a poor man . . .

HENSLOWE. Ha! You fellows are like an Egyptian plague.

POOR MAN. Yet you must be growing fat! You've some brave spirits in your company—Ned Alleyne, now.

HENSLOWE. Ay, Ned's well enough.

POOR MAN. They do say that he has set his cap at your daughter. . . .

HENSLOWE. Maybe, maybe.

POOR MAN. And I've heard that he's not alone in the field. There's another of your company who has caught the sweet contagion.

HENSLOWE. Indeed? And who may that be, heigh?

POOR MAN. Why, your jack-of-all-trades, your stop-gap, your poet-player-prompter and I know not what else—young Will Shakespeare.

[JOAN WOODWARD, *a comely girl, has entered from the back. She hears the name and approaches* HENSLOWE.

JOAN. Father, has he come yet ?

HENSLOWE. Ned Alleyne, child ?

JOAN. No, father—that same Will. [*The two men exchange a glance.*] Oh, 'tis nothing to me if he come or no. It was Bess who bade me ask you. Will promised to furnish her with a new ditty.

POOR MAN. Well, what did I say, Master Henslowe ? Good luck to the playhouse ! God be wi' you, Mistress Joan ! [*Exit, left.*

HENSLOWE. And so Will Shakespeare is bringing a song for Bess, and Bess despatched you to learn if he were come. She must be busy that she cannot step down to see.

JOAN. That wasn't my errand, father. The foreman is fretting to see you—wants to know how you would have the tiring-rooms.

HENSLOWE. [*Rising.*] Ods my life, must I put up the playhouse myself ? Can the dolts do nothing without me ? [*He turns to go out, left back.*

JOAN. [*Gathering up the new goods.*] I'd best be sorting out these.

HENSLOWE. You'd best go back to the kitchen.

JOAN. But, father . . .

HENSLOWE. Out you go !

JOAN. But—but if the strange lady should return and no one be here . . .

HENSLOWE. The strange lady can bide till I come.

JOAN. But if she won't bide ? She has been here three times enquiring for you vainly. And, father, Bess thinks that she must be some fine lady from the Court, for there be many, Bess declares, that can think on nothing but plays and players. . . .

HENSLOWE. And not they only, girl. Come—no more of your ditties, your moonshine, your Will-o'-the-wisp. Out you go!

[*He pushes her through the door, right. Exeunt.*

[*For a moment the stage is left empty. Then* EDWARD ALLEYNE, *a pompous young man, after peering about him cautiously, enters, left. He coughs to obtain attention. Unobserved by him, enter* WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *with difficulty suppressing his amusement. He leans negligently against the door, left. He coughs.*

ALLEYNE. [*Starts, turns round and confronts him.*] How now, Will? What are you seeking here?

WILL. Oh—cowslips and gilliflowers. What else?

ALLEYNE. Marry then—get you gone, for I come seeking a more precious commodity.

WILL. Ah—ladysmocks.

ALLEYNE. No ribaldry with me! Can't you read my meaning? Must I speak in capitals?

WILL. You wish me to go, Ned, but a nod's a poor hint to a blind horse.

ALLEYNE. A blind ass!

WILL. Nay, Neddy—the ass was never called "Will."

ALLEYNE. Out upon you! I came to see Master Henslowe.

WILL. And I to see Mistress Joan.

ALLEYNE. Faith, is it so? You were better employed if you conned your part for the play this afternoon instead of idling here like a young lord. A pretty figure you cut at the rehearsal this morning!

WILL. True ! I had never looked at the part.

ALLEYNE. Never looked at the part before you came to rehearse ? If I were Master Henslowe I'd send you packing for that. Do you think to become a fine player by such indolence ? Do you think that I won my reputation without hard study ?

WILL. I never think of the subject at all.

ALLEYNE. And when will you deign to learn your part ?

WILL. When, when ? Oh, likely enough while you're mouthing the prologue. I can do it readily when I wish.

ALLEYNE. Is there anything which you cannot do readily when you wish ?

WILL. Let me think. . . .

ALLEYNE. You preposterous upstart ! Why, what place do you hold in our company ? You must learn to bear yourself more modestly or the world will laugh at you.

WILL. If you laugh at the world, Ned, the world never laughs at you.

ALLEYNE. Oh, we know how you juggle with phrases. It is that same juggling tongue of yours which has made you so overweening that now you would pretend yourself capable of achieving any heights.

WILL. Aye, that's the first article in my creed.

ALLEYNE. Unparalleled !

WILL. Not quite. Alexander was of a like opinion about himself, and so, too, was Julius Cæsar ; and until his locks were shorn there was no circumference to the might of Samson.

ALLEYNE. Then prithee, young Samson, be warned in time and run from Delilah.

WILL. From Joan ? I ?

ALLEYNE. Or the wench may lead you a pretty dance.

WILL. She ! . . . Well, 'tis a comely lass.

ALLEYNE. Look you here, my penny poet—I purpose to marry the wench, and you were wiser not to straddle across my path. . . .

WILL. Yet a juggling tongue can do much with maids.

ALLEYNE. What, then ! You *do* mean to court her !

WILL. Maybe.

ALLEYNE. With an honest purpose ?

WILL. Honest ? As honest as your own.

ALLEYNE. I have told you that I am for marriage.

WILL. Marriage—ah, that's a big word.

ALLEYNE. What ! Would you toy with the lass for your pleasure ?

WILL. And you—would you marry the lass in order to assure your articles with her father ?

ALLEYNE. You mean to insult me ? I'll not be put upon.

WILL. But you boasted as much yourself.

ALLEYNE. I ? Never !

WILL. Never ? Last night—at the Mermaid ! "Lads," quoth Ned Alleyne, "I'll capture the playhouse, if I have to marry the wench withal."

ALLEYNE. I'll put up with this no longer. Will Shakespeare, you had always an envious mind that could not bear to see any man your better. . . .

WILL. What man is my better ? Bring him out.

ALLEYNE. You insolent tenth-rate patcher, you vile windbag ! . . .

[ALLEYNE *is about to fly at* SHAKESPEARE *when* JOAN *enters, right.*

JOAN. Gentlemen, gentlemen—what is amiss between you ?

WILL. [*Bowing.*] Little enough, Joan—one of the petty wars that are contrived by that madcap Cupid ; but when Lady Venus herself appears the combat is stilled.

ALLEYNE. Mistress Joan, I bring matter that cannot be spoken in the presence of a third person.

JOAN. Fie, Master Alleyne—private matters with me ?

WILL. This was *my* hour of appointment, was it not, Joan ? And you see I'm as good as my word. Here's the new song for Bess.

JOAN. I'll take it in to her ; but when will you make a song for me ?

WILL. When shall I cease to make songs for you ? I swear that for every inch of your beauty, Joan, I will fashion a sonnet. The first is already fashioned.

JOAN. Show it me, Will. Where is it ?

WILL. In my mind. I lacked leisure to pen it.

ALLEYNE. Then let it remain in its present darkness ! Mistress Joan . . .

JOAN. Master Alleyne ?

ALLEYNE. Ha ! What man could unburden his heart before the eyes of a gaping clown ?

WILL. A most fantastical suitor! He has called you a gaping clown!

ALLEYNE. Show him the door.

WILL. Aye—show me the door of your affections.

JOAN. If neither of you will budge I must even hear both. I cannot conceive, Master Alleyne, what errand could bring you to me. My father is with his foreman, and if it is to him that you desire to speak you shall find him in the new playhouse.

ALLEYNE. [*Clearing his throat and bracing himself.*] But first I would speak with you.

WILL. A little more fire, Ned, a little more fire!

ALLEYNE. Many parts have I played in seeming and not without the applause of our countrymen. On the boards of your father's old playhouse I have commanded the multitudes of Scythia, have led the Grand Turk captive, have browbeaten the Devil himself, and have won the hearts of queens, but now for the first time you see me beggared of words and overcome by a beauty to which the light of the sun is a feeble candle at noon.

WILL. Speak up, man. Not a soul in the pit can hear you.

ALLEYNE. Be silent, you fool!

WILL. And come speedily to your famous crescendo, Ned. There's no maid's heart could withstand it.

ALLEYNE. Some tokens of my esteem I have brought you, Mistress Joan, but I pray you not to measure my devotion by my offerings. . . .

WILL. Your left arm—higher, higher!

JOAN. Devotion—to me, Master Alleyne? The world swims!

ALLEYNE. Almost I count it a blasphemy to offer adornments where there is already such overwhelming beauty. . . .

WILL. [*Pulling a manuscript from his pocket and pretending to prompt from it.*] Nevertheless . . .

ALLEYNE. Nevertheless, I entreat you to accept these jewels—not for the sake of their value, though that indeed is not small, but rather . . .

WILL. [*As before.*] But rather that *you* may give them a value beyond price. How the fellow forgets his part!

ALLEYNE. Enough! If you have patience to endure this mountebank I have done.

JOAN. Prithee proceed, Master Alleyne, dear Master Alleyne. The jewels are worthy of a prince.

ALLEYNE. Would that they were worthy of a goddess! A cruel goddess. . . .

JOAN. I—cruel? What—I?

ALLEYNE. Cruel indeed to permit your unhappy slave to be tormented by the chirruping of a ridiculous grasshopper! I seek in vain for the words that might acquaint you with my condition. Have you not filched away my heart, and how then should I have heart to speak?

WILL. Better, much better.

ALLEYNE. There is little that I can say . . .

WILL. But you know me, Mistress Joan—you know me for the famous Ned Alleyne, the prince of actors, and one who can pour out passion to a clothes-peg! See me at rehearsal! I may have little wit of my own, but I warrant you there's not another in

England who can display his leg to greater advantage. Accept my suit . . .

JOAN. What, yours, Will ?

ALLEYNE. He would make a fool of me—and you, you stand by smirking like a milkmaid. If you cannot give a gentleman better treatment than this, I perceive that I had best put my matter before a higher authority.

JOAN. Would you go, Master Alleyne ? Can you not take a jest in good part ?

ALLEYNE. I go to confer with your father.

[*Exit* ALLEYNE, *right.*

WILL. Poor Ned ! If he could but laugh at himself !

JOAN. Lord, how you mocked him, how you fleered at him, Will ! He called you a grasshopper, but to call you a gadfly had been apter, so villainously you tormented the good man.

WILL. All's fair in love, they say.

JOAN. And what may you know of love ?

WILL. So much as your eyes have taught me. Ah, Joan, what it is to have Midas eyes, eyes that turn all they behold into love !

JOAN. Ah, Will—and a Midas tongue that turns every word into gold. Whose tongue is that ?

WILL. I would that your father maintained that opinion. I account myself lucky if the words that I write for him are turned into silver. But listen, Joan ! I have written a play that should bring the whole court riding to his playhouse if he will but honour me so far as to hear it. See—here it is ! [*He produces a manuscript from his doublet.*] You

cannot conceive how obstinately he refuses to give me scope. He will set me, truly, to refurbish an old play in the fashions of the time, but when I assure him that out of my own invention I could devise him a play . . .

JOAN. Plays, plays, plays! I hear nothing else all day long. I'll carry your song to Bess.

WILL. Whither away, my sweeting, whither away? Why, Joan—you mouse, you can't frown if you try!

JOAN. Speak to me of anything in the world so it be not plays!

WILL. Lovers were ever selfish, and see how you show yourself of the blood royal!

JOAN. Why, how am I selfish?

WILL. If I speak to you, Joan, I cannot hear you speak, and that is to shut me out on the cold side of heaven; for I had rather listen to the cadences of your voice than sit upon Jove's throne and take nectar from the hands of Ganymede.

JOAN. Oh, Will, how prettily you can talk! And do you really love me?

WILL. [*Glibly.*] Out of all moderation. And some day the world shall know it. I will build you a towering song that shall soar up into the stars, and pinnacled on immortal words you shall stand there in your beauty—the regret and the envy of all ages. Wait, wait! When your father shall purchase my play —[*Her interest declines*]—I shall be like a galleon unmoored which, going forth slowly at first, shall gather up the wind of admiration and sail at last into the open sea and the sunlight of universal fame. My play . . .

JOAN. But the sonnet : you said you had made me a sonnet.

WILL. And what is a sonnet but a rose that flowers from the mind ? If I give you the rose of my fancy you must give me the rose of your mouth.

JOAN. If the sonnet be fair, the payment shall be in full.

WILL. [*Who, in reciting the sonnet, is under the necessity of referring here and there to his manuscript play.*]

" So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not
To those fresh morning drops upon the rose,
As thy eyebeams, when their fresh rays have smote
The night of dew that on my cheek down flows ;
Nor shines the silver moon one-half so bright
Through the transparent bosom of the deep,
As doth thy face through tears of mine give light ;
Thou shinest in every tear that I do weep :
No drop but as a coach doth carry thee ;
So ridest thou triumphing in my woe.
Do but behold the tears that swell in me,

And they thy glory through my grief will show ;
But do not love thyself ; then thou wilt keep
My tears for glasses, and still make me weep."

JOAN. Poor Will—you shall weep no longer. I'll love you so well that henceforth you shall make merry sonnets. And when, when, when shall we marry ?

WILL. Ah, that must be thought on at leisure. For the present, let's love ! [*They embrace.*

PHILIP HENSLOWE *enters, right.*

HENSLOWE. Ods my life, what's here ? Joan, into the house at once—at once, I say !

JOAN. But, father, Will is going to wed me. . . .

HENSLOWE. Is he, is he ? You can't have two husbands. Into the house, baggage, and leave this fine gentleman to me.

JOAN. But he loves me . . .

HENSLOWE. Am I master in my own house or not ? Out you go instantly or I'll thrash you !

WILL. Aye, Joan, be a dutiful daughter. Carry the song to Bess. We'll soon have all trim.

JOAN. I won't marry Ned Alleyne—never, never, never ! [*Exit, right.*

HENSLOWE. Well, sir, well ? And what can you say for yourself ? Do you fancy that I'll permit my daughter to be bandied about like a tennis ball, like a painted Jezebel, between the rag-tag-and-bob-tail of my company ? You misconceive me, young master.

Nay, nay—not a step ! You don't leave this room until you have given me an explanation of your effrontery.

WILL. I entered this room, Master Henslowe, in the very hope that you would demand that explanation.

HENSLOWE. Put a guard on your tongue, boy. If you serve out any of your impudence to me, I'll make it a matter for the Justices of the Peace.

WILL. Methinks they care more for the stealing of venison than for the stealing of a kiss. Moreover, my purpose in trying to win your daughter's affection is one that should bring you great honour.

HENSLOWE. I am eager to learn in what way you can possibly bring honour to me. Ned Alleyne is first in the field . . .

WILL. And a capable actor he is ! But consider, Master Henslowe—your actor is but the shadow of your poet, and oftwhiles a shadow, too, that most lamentably distorts the original. You are a man, as all men allow, who can shrewdly prize merit before it has obtained the imprimatur of the multitude. To-day Ned Alleyne stands higher in reputation than I, but to-morrow the see-saw will send me skyward. The future is mine, Master Alleyne ! For me renown is a ripe fruit on a high wall, and for the plucking of it I lack nothing but a three-foot ladder. Nurse me, cherish me, give me a hand now, while I need it, and I warrant you I'll bring you the golden apples of the Hesperides.

HENSLOWE. Come to the heart of your matter. There's no rhymester but swears he's another Kit Marlowe.

WILL. Have I not proven my ability in the plays which I have metamorphosed for the gilding of your purse ?

HENSLOWE. You have shown a pretty talent, and I have paid a pretty price. Have I not advanced you monies upon your bare word to execute these commissions—as with that new scene for " Machiavelli " which you promised to deliver me last week . . . ?

WILL. You shall have it—you shall have everything. Do but give me my freedom, and you shall be repaid a thousandfold. Let me pen you a play that shall be wholly mine. You will then admit that I do not boast, but prophesy.

HENSLOWE. Nay, sir, you have not the skill for it.

WILL. But here in my pocket . . .

HENSLOWE. Away with it, away with it ! I'll have none of your trumpery. What—will you dangle again your precious " Love's Labour " before my eyes ? Must I tell you once more that I have no coin to pour down a sieve ?

WILL. But how can you tell ? You have never read it.

HENSLOWE. I have read as much as I wish. Do you think that your new-fangled nonsense would fill my playhouse ? I know what the world likes. A tale from the Bible or a tale from history—there's money in these ; but what gentleman would cross the Thames in order to see a play by Will Shakespeare of Stratford ?

WILL. Master Henslowe, you are a shrewd hand at a bargain. I will make you a proposition after your own heart.

Enter, left back, JOAN, *timidly.*

Set your hand—here and now—to a deed whereby you, Master Philip Henslowe—engage to present this play in its entirety as it shall leave my hand. . . .

HENSLOWE. And on your side, prithee ?

WILL. And on my side, I will content myself with the maid's beauty and will ask not a groat by way of dowry.

HENSLOWE. Insolent knave ! Do you take me for a simpleton ? I'll have none of you or your play. You conceive me ? Once for all, I'll have none of you or your fool's play !

WILL. Blind stone ! . . . then, understand *me,* Master Henslowe—for I'll have none of the slut, your daughter !

JOAN. Will ! . . . Master Shakespeare !

HENSLOWE. Ha, child—now you see to what manner of man you have lent your lips !

WILL. Mistress Joan, I entreat your pardon. . . .

JOAN. I will never grant it ! Slut, forsooth—I ! And was all your windy wooing for no other end than that by wedding with me you might prevail upon my father to present your fooleries ? What—am I to be taken in lieu of cash ? What, what, I say—am I merely the portal to my father's patronage? You serpent !

HENSLOWE. Aye, sting him with the tail of your tongue—do, do !

JOAN. And where now is your tumbling torrent of words? Can you answer a maid at no time but when she is deceived?

WILL. Joan, Joan—do but reflect. Here I stand with a play the like of which the world has never seen, and your father, through whom the world might see it, will not so much as peruse it. What can I do? I have tried persuasion, I have tried cajolery, I have tried stratagem—and now even *that* has failed me. I might have known that it would, the play being aptly entitled "Love's Labour's Lost."

HENSLOWE. Infamous! Monstrous!

[*He goes out, right, brusquely, to bring* ALLEYNE.

JOAN. And you've cut your own fingers, Master Sharp-wit. Do you think that I was in earnest? What simpletons countrymen are! I played with you, played with you for my pleasure. What—wed with a man of your stature?

Enter right, HENSLOWE *and* ALLEYNE.

Faith, when I wed, I'll wed bravely. Ned Alleyne's a proper man.

[*Hearing these words,* ALLEYNE *goes to her joyfully. She relapses upon his bosom.*

WILL. In good sooth, he is, and I wish you both joy of the marriage.

JOAN. And maybe 'tis Bess whom you think that *you'll* marry? Is *that* why you made me your Mercury?

WILL. Bess, Bess? A fig for your Bess!

JOAN. O-ho—a fig for her, too! Then why do you send her songs? If ever you marry Bess . . .

WILL. But I never shall.

JOAN. You will, you will, you will!

WILL. Perhaps, when the Turk has conquered England and every man may gather wives by the handful, but not before!

HENSLOWE. What? What?

WILL. For the most prevalent and incomparable reason that I am already a married man.

JOAN. You?

WILL. And have been for these six years.

HENSLOWE. [*Amazed.*] From the time that you settled in London?

WILL. Driven from Stratford by a surfeit of married bliss.

JOAN. You monster!

ALLEYNE. Can you never be serious?

WILL. Sometimes—when I am writing. And always when I hear music.

JOAN. You've got no heart.

WILL. Who knows? I have never yet lost it—except to the goddess—my Muse. 'Tis not for mortal woman.

JOAN. Then, I pray heaven that you shall meet your match, and meet her soon. I pray heaven that you shall lose your heart to a woman without mercy, without scruple, without the least particle of kindness—no mortal, but a she-devil with beauty so ravishing that you shall count the sun black if she be not by you, and of spirit cold as a statue that you may dash yourself vainly against her contempt. I pray that she may draw you through all the torments of hell till you be utterly abased, till your insolence

and your vanity be brought to the ground and you remember with misery the days when you looked upon life as a skittles-alley and the hearts of good maids as ninepins !

WILL. [*Uneasily.*] Faith—you curse roundly !

HENSLOWE. [*Holding open the door, left.*] And now, sir, the door stands open. You can practise your pranks elsewhere. [*As* SHAKESPEARE *is about to go.*] But, look you, I must have that scene for "Machiavelli" or my money back. You hear ?

[*From within the house, right, comes the sound of a prelude upon the lute.* SHAKESPEARE'S *manner changes. His confidence restored, he pauses and then involuntarily returns.*

WILL. I hear my faithful Bess ! 'Tis the new song. I must learn how the cadences match.

[*He brushes past the astonished* HENSLOWE *and crosses to the door, right, where he stands listening.*

A VOICE. [*Within, singing to the lute.*]

"When daisies pied and violets blue,
And ladysmocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Mocks married men ; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo ;
Cuckoo, cuckoo : O word of fear,
Unpleasing to the married ear !"

A passage for the lute.

[*Enter, left,* THE DARK LADY. *Hearing the music, she raises her hand to prevent any interruption, and listens.*

[SHAKESPEARE *turns and sees her. Throughout the ensuing verse he is torn between his interest in the song and the lady's fascination, finally yielding entirely to the latter.*

THE VOICE. [*Within, as before.*]

"When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And merry larks are ploughman's clocks,
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: O word of fear,
Unpleasing to the married ear!"

[HENSLOWE *obsequiously catches the mantle which the* LADY *discards.* JOAN *moves across to her.*

WILL. [*Grips* ALLEYNE'S *arm. With a note of earnestness for the first time.*] Alleyne—who is that world's wonder?

EPISODE II

1596

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *aged* 32.
JOHN HEMINGES, *the actor.*
THE DARK LADY (ROSALINE), *a maid-of-honour.*
"MR. W. H." (PROTEUS), *a young nobleman.*
WILL KEMP, *clown and singer.*

EPISODE II

SCENE : *Interior of* SHAKESPEARE'S *lodging in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate; a beamed room. Back left, a diamond-latticed window. In front of this, an oak table littered with papers. Back right, a door. A bench, right.*

TIME : *It is late afternoon of an August day in* 1596.

SHAKESPEARE *is discovered at his table, writing. After a few moments he leans back in his chair and repeats to himself the lines which he has just composed.*

WILL. " For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,
But to the earth some special good doth give ;
Nor aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse :

Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime 's by action dignified."

[*He resumes his work. A brief interval.*

Enter JOHN HEMINGES.

HEMINGES. Will, Will! Come out with me to the fields! What, gathering cobwebs at your table on a fair summer's evening? Up, lad, up! Sundays were never meant for toil. Will—what, Will, I say? . . . 'Swounds, he has posted to Mount Olympus on a goose-quill, and I might as profitably holloa to the dead.

WILL. [*Not looking up.*] Prithee forbear, Jack. I am in the rhyming humour.

HEMINGES. Oo! Then rhyme away while you can—for, look you, I am no more than the first drop of the shower. There be others below who are leagued for your undoing.

WILL. [*Turning.*] Is it so? Then bid them understand that when I am proof against Jack Heminges and the green fields of London I am not to be cozened by any man.

HEMINGES. Nor any maid neither?

WILL. Not by the Queen herself, Jack.

HEMINGES. Good downright speech, and I'll tell them. Plain words were never wasted on plain John Heminges. I'll leave you to your Italian lovers—but, Lord! What a tyrant it is, this passion for pen and paper! [*Exit.*

WILL. [*Completes the passage which* HEMINGES *had interrupted.*] Now, these—how do these trip it?

"Within the infant rind of this small
flower

Poison hath residence, and medicine power :
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part,
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposed kings encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will ;
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant."

What more ? " Full soon the canker death eats up that plant . . ."

[*Enter* THE DARK LADY. *She pauses at the door.*

DARK LADY : Where the Queen herself might not enter . . .

WILL. Rosaline !

DARK LADY. How should a maid-of-honour dare to intrude ? Nevertheless, Will, I dare it ! I beseech you for sanctuary.

WILL. Sanctuary ? From what ?

DARK LADY. The babble of tongues below.

WILL. You have been with others—down there ? Oh, why did you tarry so long ?

DARK LADY. I doubted my welcome. I am a proud woman, and like not to be disdained.

WILL. *I*—disdain *you !* When the moth disdains the candle !

DARK LADY. [*Gently.*] Ah, Will—it is quiet here. You make your room sweet. [*A little imperiously.*] Take my cloak. [*Sitting in the chair which he had vacated.*] Down yonder they chatter of nothing but this rumoured attack on the Spaniards at Cadiz. I am weary of brave deeds, of midnight sallies, and the setting of ships on fire. I abominate Cadiz.

WILL. And why you abominate it, I can guess.

DARK LADY. Prithee, your excellent reason ?

WILL. Do I not know you . . .

DARK LADY. [*Freezingly.*] Indeed ?

WILL. So much of you, rather, as a man may know of this new America. You sicken to hear of brave actions because you would fain be doing them.

DARK LADY. [*With intensity.*] Ah, yes—if I were but a man !

WILL. Then would the world have lost her chief glory.

DARK LADY. A truce to your compliments, Master Shakespeare. I am not in the humour for them. There have been days—and there have been nights—when you loved me so well that you had no heart for these tongue-toys. . . .

WILL. If silence could teach you what I suffer, God knows I would turn Trappist to-night and utter no syllable for the residue of my days—unless, indeed, like a rosary, I should tell over the syllables of your name.

DARK LADY. [*Gaily, resenting his serious tone.*] Why, that would be sorrier still. I like not a lover who can say nothing but his lady's name or those

three little foolish words which every hobbledehoy blurts out to the bailiff's daughter. What pleasure can a woman derive from hearing a man mumble "I love you"? Is it not her right to be loved? I account it mine.

WILL. If I speak, you charge me with flattery: if I am silent, you scorn me for a rustic. There is a third way, and the third way is the sweetest.

DARK LADY. [*Petulantly.*] Nay, Will—torment me not with your love. I am tired of kisses.

WILL. Hardly, I think, of mine.

DARK LADY. Of any man's. [*Teasingly.*] Were it not so, I might have granted him one.

WILL. Him?

DARK LADY. Our friend, our Proteus.

WILL. [*Eagerly.*] He is there—below?

DARK LADY. Can you think that I wander about the purlieus of the city without a swordsman? Am I so notably ill-favoured that I have nothing to fear from men? [*With feigned seriousness.*] Oh, that I had bright hair! If I bleached it in the manner of the Venetian courtezans, you would not despise me. Then, perhaps, you would love me indeed.

WILL. Rosaline, bait me no longer. Would you have me tell you forever that I have Marc Antony's eyes, and find more splendour in the night than in the day? Alas, and I have his heart, too.

DARK LADY. You are false, Will, false. I know that you love fairness in a woman.

WILL. Then for once you read me wrongly.

DARK LADY. Not so. I have heard you say that she is flaxen.

WILL. Who ?

DARK LADY. Who ? The good woman at Stratford, your dearly-beloved wife.

WILL. She is nothing to me, nothing.

DARK LADY. To you ! Very like : but sometimes you fancy that you love me, and it cannot be nothing to me that my lover is bound to a wife. Tell me about the good soul. Is she tall ? Is she taller than I ? Is she witty ? Has she skill in the charming of men ?

WILL. I have blotted her out of my thoughts. I hardly remember her face.

DARK LADY. [*With real amazement.*] Hardly remember her face ?

WILL. Her colour is light—that is true ; for the rest, I have clean forgotten her.

DARK LADY. [*Sighing.*] Then soon you will forget me.

WILL. When I married I was a boy. Now that I love, I am a man.

DARK LADY. What delicate hair-splitting is here ! Come, all ye people, and hearken to good Father Will the Jesuit ! [*With a sudden change of tone.*] You loved her, Will. Before you had her, you loved—but a passion that's dead has the sickly smell of dead lilies and we say to ourselves—" That ? *That* was not love ! "

WILL. Shall I tell you what pushed me to holy wedlock ?

DARK LADY. [*As one who is afraid of gravity.*] Why, the weariness of a villager's life—a surfeit of playing push-halfpenny at the ale-house, of listening

to the good-man parson's homilies, of dancing morrises on the green. [*Genuinely.*] Nay, nay, in all serious divination I have plumbed the cause. You got her with child, poor boy.

WILL. 'Twas little I knew of women! I had given them never a thought, so happy was I in the companionship of the streams, and the oaks and the meadow-flowers of my country—and in the song-books and the ballad-sheets that I got by heart as I sprawled in the fields at home. Do you think it was Anne that I loved that day? You are too wise to think it. Not to her, Rosaline, did I lose my heart, but to the merry clouds of spring that were above her and the green rye through which I saw her coming. Our families did the rest—cooped up in a parlour for hours on end, while all the summer squandered itself outside, and prating of honour and the girl's innocence. Dead lilies—fling them away!

DARK LADY. And yet I mistrust you. I think you will leave me for her.

WILL. How you mock me, Rosaline!

DARK LADY. Sometimes I wish that I were the Queen and might command you to attend me always. . . .

WILL. Is there need to command?

DARK LADY. [*Intentionally cruel.*] And sometimes I wish you were at Stratford.

WILL. I shall not leave London. I have set myself much to do.

DARK LADY. Well said! You were ever ambitious, and I—but what can a woman achieve? Tell me your hopes.

WILL. Not hopes—they are purposes. Imprimis, I will throw forth into the world the sweetest and mirthfullest comedies that ever bubbled from the wit and imagination of man.

DARK LADY. [*With involuntary admiration.*] Something of this you have done. But no more tragedies? Would you pluck the laurels from Terence and not covet those of Seneca?

WILL. If you smile upon me I shall write no more tragedies.

DARK LADY. [*Touching the manuscript on the table.*] If I smile upon you? And this? 'Tis a comedy, I doubt not.

WILL. [*Sorrowfully.*] It is a tragedy.

DARK LADY. [*Again afraid of true feeling.*] The tale of Romeo! Then if I am too kind to you I shall put your Muse out of vein. But these purposes—acquaint me with the next.

WILL. [*Briskly, as if with an effort to avoid boring her.*] Item, a fortune out of these trifles and therewithal the knighthood which only the blindness of the Three Fates denied me at birth.

DARK LADY. [*Seriously.*] Well, at least the Queen affects you!

WILL. Item, your husband shall die of the plague. . . .

DARK LADY. God rest his soul!

WILL. Item, at the same instant my wife shall die of an apoplexy.

DARK LADY. And to what end is all this butchery?

WILL. Guess, if you can!

DARK LADY. Nay, Will—you must win the knighthood first.

WILL. Item, my little son Hamnet . . .

DARK LADY. A-ha! So the hero enters at last! Let the play proceed!

WILL. I say, the boy Hamnet . . .

DARK LADY. Whom you doat upon so extremely that for ten years you have never journeyed to see him!

WILL. Whom I love so dearly, Rosaline, that of late he has seldom been far from my thoughts.

DARK LADY. On, then! Would you have him a player?

WILL. A player—he? You are never weary of mocking! Do you count me so poor in pride that without compulsion I would hand on the livery of service, as though it were an heirloom, to my son? I abhor the calling of a player—and I curse the trick of fortune that steered me on to the stage. No, no—if I toil hard, it is for Hamnet. If I would win renown, if I would make a breach in the world and carry its treasure by storm, it is that I would set Hamnet among those who command, not among those who serve. I know that I shall achieve greatly, for I know that a great force drives me onward, but I, I was betrayed and hampered from the first by the fallen estate of my father. Hamnet shall sail into life with a fair wind behind him, and when he is grown from a pretty boy to manhood . . .

DARK LADY. And how can you tell that he is pretty?

WILL. And witty, too—for he must be.

DARK LADY. I marvel, then, that you never take horse for Stratford.

WILL. Hamnet shall come to me—when the way is ready and the hour strikes. I will never go back to Stratford, never!

DARK LADY. Item, O wicked and yet adorable Rosaline, I will never set foot on my village-green—unless you decree it, unless you torment me from London.

WILL. Let a few years pass, and I'll send for Hamnet . . .

DARK LADY. [*With sudden fury.*] They have passed, and Hamnet is here, and the Queen has granted him a commission in her body-guard, and Will Shakespeare can spare not a thought for Rosaline, not a thought—I will grant you all this if you will but cease for a little to prate of this tedious Hamnet! [*Very sweetly*]. Have I hurt you, Will? Maybe he is all that you think. I hope it, truly . . . And if I then can, I will help him at court.

WILL. Sweetheart—enough of my aims! But you, if you had your choice . . .?

DARK LADY. [*Sadly.*] Oh, I know well what I would be.

WILL. What, then? The Queen of the Amazons? The Pope's daughter—to sit on his throne, like Lucretia, and receive on your white foot the all too fervent kisses of cardinals? The genius of a river? Or maybe the moon in heaven—that not one but all the poets might adore you?

DARK LADY. Look not so high for the answer.

WILL. I must leave the riddle unsolved.

DARK LADY. [*Simple and sincere.*] If you could choose, Will, you'd be a lord, and I . . . ? I'd be a player !

WILL. A player ? To strut and rant on the stage ?

DARK LADY. That's the true life—that only. Think you that I hover about the playhouses from no other urge than my liking of you ? It is not enough to be a lady at the Queen's beck and call. Are there not seven colours in the rainbow ? And here in my little body I have a thousand souls. I am tyrant, slave, enchantress, harlot, and bashful Puritan, too. Were I a player I could loose all these at my pleasure, Will, and oh, how I'd make men laugh and weep, how I'd show the world what it means to love !

WILL. A woman-player ! Nay, that were a fine new marvel.

DARK LADY. [*Annoyed.*] I could put down any man with my playing.

WILL. [*Laughing.*] But a woman-player ! Marry, she'd be out of her part on a hundred provocations. Why, the gentlemen on the stage would vouchsafe her no peace ; and in a twinkling the clouds of their tobacco-smoke would have driven her, weeping and puking, from the boards !

DARK LADY. [*With repressed anger.*] You doubt my skill ? Answer me ! Doubt, if you must, for a better than you maintains me in my belief.

WILL. Who ?

DARK LADY. A certain lord whom in these parts we call Proteus. He has declared that could I but present a subtle woman, a woman of your devising,

I should make all London dizzy. [*Ironically.*] But maybe Proteus loves me; and much, I know, must be discounted in a lover.

WILL. And do I not love you?

DARK LADY. Why, you know nothing of love.

WILL. I—nothing?

DARK LADY. As yet. You are dreaming: but, some day, I think you will wake.

WILL. Is it possible to love more?

DARK LADY. [*With passion, softly.*] If you loved me greatly, I should be a flame that devoured you, and you would no longer divide your heart betwixt me and a child at Stratford.

WILL. Rosaline, there are times when I wish that I were in the harbour of old age, never again to be swept and buffetted by the cross-winds of passion.

DARK LADY. And yet, man, you have scarce begun to love.

WILL. If there be more to learn—instruct me.

DARK LADY. What, I? You must learn in a humbler school, for I have tired of so dull a pupil.

Enter "MR. W. H."

W. H. Rosaline, Rosaline! So you would give me the slip! . . . Now look you, Will, if you enchant her away from me so heartlessly I shall never forgive you—in this world or the next.

WILL. Why, Proteus, sweet friend, you upbraid Ulysses for enchanting Calypso.

DARK LADY. Ulysses? Ulysses broke her spell.

WILL. He desired to break it.

W. H. A bull's-eye for you, Will, since no one who steps into the circle of my lady's charm would

ever wish to get out. Marry, I had rather await the onslaught of the whole Spanish fleet, and I with a single pinnace, than endure for five minutes the anger of those dark eyes. Great news, Will, great news! It came to the court this morning . . .

DARK LADY. Ods life, would he still be chattering of Cadiz? I am quick to follow my cue.

[*She moves to the door.*

WILL. I entreat you, tarry a little!

DARK LADY. And hear yet more of Cadiz?

W. H. I conceive you, Rosaline. You are at one with the French poet. [*He trolls out the lines*]:

"Quoy qu'on die d'Italiennes,
Il n'est bon bec que de Paris."

Ah, that was a hundred years ago, and the poor man had never seen *you*.

DARK LADY. Nay, Proteus—Will has a comedy on hand, the wondrous comedy of Messer Romeo. We trouble the Muse. Moreover, I have a word for your ear.

W. H. A secret? Then I am with you. And yet I am sorry that *I* should lack what the world itself most lacks . . .

WILL. What mean you, my lord?

W. H. Why—a little more of good-Will!

DARK LADY. Merrily said. But come now!

[*Exit.*

W. H. "I am gone, sir,
And anon, sir,
I'll be with you again." [*Exit.*

[SHAKESPEARE *closes the door, takes a few steps, left, and sighs.*

WILL. I wonder. . . . [*He crosses the room slowly, sits down at the table, takes up his quill, and studies the manuscript before him.*]

"And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant." . . .

Here Romeo shall enter. . . . How dim it is growing. I must have candles. [*He sets two candles on the table.*] And now—where's the tinder? Not here? [*He searches vainly for the tinder-box.*]

Enter MR. W. H.

W. H. Woe's me, my friend—or rather, I fear, woe's you!

WILL. Why, Proteus, what's amiss?

W. H. Indeed, as I love you, I must hope that I'm in error. We had barely gained the parlour when a poor woman comes knocking, knocking timidly, at the door.

WILL. Well? A beggar?

W. H. A poor dazed country-woman, staring about her with big, sad eyes. "O gentlemen," says she, "I am seeking for Master Shakespeare, the son of the alderman, and folk tell that he lodges hereabout." With that she pitches a story of having footed the long journey from Stratford in Warwickshire; and in our esteeming the dusty, worn look of her was a warrant that she told truth.

WILL. From Stratford?

W. H. I judged it were well to forewarn you, so I said I would bring her word if you were at home or

no, and entreated her in the meantime to rest her wracked limbs on a bench.

WILL. I thank you. 'Tis Anne—my wife.

W. H. As I feared. Shall I give her direction to some honest tavern ?

WILL. She has footed from Stratford, you say. . . . And at least she could give me news of Hamnet. She is alone ? I pray you, bid her come in.

[*Exit* MR. W. H.

[SHAKESPEARE *goes to the cupboard—left of the table—and takes out a bottle of ale and a pewter mug. He sets them on the bench, right ; then returns to the table, and stands facing the door.*

[*Enter the* DARK LADY *disguised by a fair wig, and a hooded cloak of humble material. She is about to run to him, but he checks her with his hand.*

"ANNE." [*With a curtsey.*] God save thee, husband.

WILL. Be seated, Anne. On that bench you will find a jug of ale. You must be spent.

"ANNE." La, Will—I had scarce known thee, boy. What fine clouts ! What gentlemanlike bearing !

WILL. And you, methinks, have changed out of all reckoning.

"ANNE." 'Tis years of suffering that have changed me, Will—suffering at thy hands.

WILL. Marry, you thrive on it : for, ten years ago, you were not so well-favoured.

"ANNE." Thou'lt return with me, then, to Stratford ?

WILL. Never !

" ANNE." Nay, husband, thou art bold to flout the will of the Lord. The mighty shall be humbled, and the proud in their strength shall be brought low. Come with me back to thy home, and I'll forgive all wrongs.

WILL. What news of Hamnet ?

" ANNE." La, Will—how the boy waxes ! A quaint, merry sprite, i' good faith ! Not a day passes but the shrimp enquires for his father.

WILL. Does he well at the Grammar School ? Can he write his name ?

" ANNE." Aye—so our schoolmaster saith, but how should a self-respecting woman judge of scholarship ? Yet he sings lustily in the choir of a Sunday, Will, that verily thou would'st warm to him an' thou heard'st him trebling and chirruping with the best—nay, Parson is well pleased with the child and saith to me no later than last Tuesday—" Mistress Shakespeare," saith he, " that such a mirror of piety should have blossomed from such a cloud of iniquity," meaning you, Will.

WILL. And the boy loves the green country about him ?

" ANNE." What ! Would'st have him gad in the fields and idle away his hours in unrighteous frivolity ? If he works not with me in our house, he is ever with Master Parson. Ah, if the Lord see good, the boy may grow to a notable preacher.

WILL. Hamnet, my Hamnet—a preacher, and maybe a whining Puritan ! Faugh—these are ill news.

"ANNE." Will, Will—Heaven save thee, for thy soul is indeed damned and, without repentance, thou'rt no better than chopped wood for the fires everlasting.

WILL. Is it so that you babble to the boy? Nay, I've a mind to go to Stratford. . . .

"ANNE." Will!

WILL. If it be but to show him the Bible of the earth and to teach him to quire with the birds! Yet I cannot come. I am fast in London.

"ANNE." What should hold thee?

WILL. Much—much.

"ANNE." Thou hast friends? Could they not visit thee? Thou'st forgotten my skill at a barley-cake.

WILL. A lord of the realm and a lady in the Queen's court would soon grow weary of barley-cake.

"ANNE." A lady?

WILL. A maid-of-honour.

"ANNE." Will, thou hast fallen into sin! Art thou cozened from the path of grace by this lord, this anti-Christ, and his lady, thy Scarlet Woman? Did I not warn thee that Babylon should be thy undoing? Nay, 'twere better for Hamnet that he should never be smirched by the lewd converse of a profligate, a fornicator, a bawdy player. Nay, until thou art washed clean thou shalt never return to Stratford—nay. . . .

WILL. To-morrow, Anne, I shall fare to Stratford, and I shall rest in the village for a matter of two weeks. Thereafter I shall return hither—with Hamnet!

"ANNE." Set but thy foot in our town and, I warrant thee, Master Parson shall turn thee from thy wickedness. To-night I will share thy lodging.

WILL. That—never!

Enter MR. W. H. *with a light.*

W. H. The fifteen minutes have flown. How fares the poor traveller?

DARK LADY. Famously, famously! Proteus, he will go to Stratford to-morrow.

WILL. "Proteus"?

DARK LADY. [*Removing her disguise.*] Who was it mocked my dream of a woman-player?

WILL. Rosaline!

DARK LADY. Who was it doubted my skill? Who swore never to give me lodgment here? And who was it said he would never go back to Stratford?

WILL. And have I gone back to Stratford? [*Laughing heartily.*] By my soul, 'twas well done—the blackest of nightmares but the blithest of jests!

W. H. Yet, Will, you have lost me a wager. [*To the* DARK LADY.] I will bring you the hound to-morrow.

[*At this moment* WILL KEMP *and a couple of* PLAYERS *burst in helter-skelter.*

KEMP. Good even, Will—and to you, my lord—and to you, my lady.

W. H. Why, Kemp, you come in the nick of time. We owe you something in laughter, and here's a rare jest—fit matter for a penny ballad. Hark you. . . .

WILL. No more, for the lady's sake.

DARK LADY. For mine? I care not a rush.

WILL. Yet I beg you . . .

W. H. Well, as you wish. Gentlemen, what news ?

KEMP. Sir—Will—young Morley's the world's tenth marvel !

WILL. He has found an air for the song ?

KEMP. And the sweetest you ever heard.

DARK LADY. Sing it, sing it.

W. H. Some of Will's words ?

KEMP. Aye, sir — from the play for "Twelfth Night." Lord, 'twill take wondrously ! Bring me a lute [*To* WILL.]

DARK LADY. [*To one of the* PLAYERS.] I would see the music. [SHAKESPEARE *fetches his lute.*

[*The* PLAYER *hands the sheet of music to the* DARK LADY. KEMP *tunes the instrument, the rest disposing themselves to listen.*

Enter JOHN HEMINGES *unceremoniously.*

HEMINGES. Will, boy !

W. H. S'life, man—can you not see that the company waits for a song ?

HEMINGES. Your pardon, my lord. Look you—[*To* SHAKESPEARE]—there was one at the playhouse enquiring for you. He had ridden post from Stratford.

WILL. Enough, Jack.

HEMINGES. And he bade me give you this letter.

WILL. But you come when the jest is over.

W. H. Stay—I know nothing of this. You had best read it.

HEMINGES. Here's little matter for laughter, I fear.

WILL. What ? Give it me.

[*He takes the letter, reads it, the others remaining silent. His head droops forward.*

W. H. My friend ! Ill news ?

WILL. Hamnet—he's dead.

DARK LADY. [*Running forward in tears.*] Will !

W. H. [*Also going to him.*] What can I do ?

WILL. [*Dazed and moving away from them.*] I must go—to Stratford—to-night.

W. H. I'll help you to put up your chattels, Will.

[SHAKESPEARE *and* MR. W. H. *set about gathering the necessities for the journey.*

DARK LADY. [*Seemingly heartless.*] Kemp — the music.

KEMP. [*Shocked.*] What, lady ?

DARK LADY. [*Imperiously.*] Sing it.

KEMP. [*Singing.*]

" Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid ;
Fly away, fly away, breath ;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it !
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it."

[*The curtain falls. As it rises again* KEMP *is singing the second verse.*

" Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be
strewn ;

Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones
shall be thrown :
A thousand, thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there."

[*Toward the close of the song,* SHAKESPEARE *hurries out with his bundle.*

EPISODE III

1602

CHARACTERS

Mr. W. H.
William Shakespeare, *aged* 38.
The Stage-keeper of the Globe Theatre.
The Dark Lady.
Richard Burbage, *the actor.*
Richard Robinson, *the Queen in "Hamlet."*
Will Kemp, *first Grave-digger in "Hamlet."*
Robert Armin (Mute), *second Grave-digger in "Hamlet."*

EPISODE III

SCENE : *The stage of the Globe Theatre. Properties are scattered here and there, coils of rope, etc. A property throne stands left front. An entrance, back centre ; another, front right.*

TIME : *Early winter,* 1602.

Enter, back centre, MR. W. H. *and* SHAKESPEARE.

W. H. But reflect, man—for years past you have put some faith in my judgment, and I swear, as I love you, that not since Rome fell has the world seen the match of this play !

WILL. [*Darkly.*] As you love me ?

W. H. Aye—'tis the very summit and outpost of your invention. [*He seats himself in the property throne.* SHAKESPEARE *moves from point to point of the stage.*] Who shall dare to present " The Spanish Tragedy " now ? Who will care to hearken while " Tamburlaine " bellows like a bull ? And yet, had he lived, what wonder would this " Hamlet " have kindled in the generous heart of Kit Marlowe ! Not

so with Master Benjamin Jonson, I fear me. We must beware of Ben. 'Tis a jealous god, and the rich fare of your "Hamlet" will give him a queasy stomach!

WILL. Strange—is it not?—that any man should be envious of me!

W. H. Why, what new quirk has put you into so deep a dump?

WILL. Shall I answer? Where is the need? Did I not give you my heart—once?

W. H. [*Uneasily.*] Well—but think, is it nothing to have scaled the peak of Parnassus?

WILL. Nothing.

W. H. You take no pleasure of your fame?

WILL. She is false, boy, false.

W. H. Fame? Not to you!

WILL. I say, she is false; a wanton.

W. H. Nay, Will, you chide me too grimly. Can you not smile at the waywardness of a woman? What are women but thistledown?

WILL. Some could be more, an' they would. Oh, once I was happy enough to snatch at thistledown, but the years have changed me—and I think they have changed the world. Honesty is an old tune to which no one will dance to-day. Aye, and between friends, Proteus . . .

W. H. [*Rising.*] Enough, enough! You are too free.

WILL. Bear with me, friend. I am overwrought.

W. H. [*Re-seating himself.*] Is it not enough to *play* the ghost, Will? Must you be spying them, too?

WILL. The ghost! Aye, they have set me to play the ghost, but the part of Hamlet might have been fitter—and you, my lord, how excellent well you might discharge the part of Horatio!

W. H. Horatio? I?

WILL. The true friend, the one man trusted by Hamlet. You smile at so odd a whimsy.

W. H. At nothing indeed but the outlandish name. To call an Englishman "Horatio"!

[*Enter, right, the* DARK LADY *ushered in by the* STAGE-KEEPER.

STAGE-KEEPER. Lo, madam—milord is upon the stage. [MR. W. H. *and* SHAKESPEARE *bow.*

DARK LADY. Ah, Proteus!

STAGE-KEEPER. Was I not a true prophet? I shall make almanacks!

WILL. Peace, fellow. Is Burbage come?

[*The* DARK LADY *crosses and occupies the throne.*

STAGE-KEEPER. Sir, Master Burbage is now in the tiring-room. I will advise him that you wait.

[*Exit, centre.*

W. H. You are weary, Rosaline.

DARK LADY. In good faith, I have long been weary of much. . . . And how of your "Hamlet," Will? Do they play it to your liking?

WILL. Well enough.

W. H. But now you may judge for yourself.

DARK LADY. I am weary indeed, my Proteus. For the last seven nights I have had to get sleep by

the inch—when I could. But you know the Queen—how exacting she has become. You remember that luckless Italian duke ?

W. H. I remember how prettily you covered up his fault !

DARK LADY. Truly, I think she has lost in patience what she has gained in years.

W. H. Sh !

DARK LADY. What ! Shall I not open my mind to *you* ? And Will is no traitor, no tell-tale.

W. H. You will much admire at his play of "Hamlet."

DARK LADY. I doubt not I shall—and yet I could wish that it might be tedious, for then the billowing voice of Master Burbage might cradle me to sleep. Plays ! I had almost forgotten the world of plays.

WILL. And the playwright, too ?

DARK LADY. Why, three days ago I was with you.

WILL. Three ! It is ten.

DARK LADY. I am ever at fault with figures—am I not, Proteus ? And you are the ghost, Will. [*To* MR. W. H.] Did you not tell me so ?

W. H. True—Will is the ghost.

DARK LADY. Is he terrible in the part ? I had sooner he were a man of flesh and bone to chastise the enemies of Denmark or to thrust a rapier through the heart of the villain.

WILL. So ? So ?

Enter, back centre, RICHARD BURBAGE.

BURBAGE. Good-morrow, my lady—my lord. Good morrow, Will. All's ready.

DARK LADY. Master Burbage, I hunger to see this play—like a woman with child. And our author—does he make the ghost horrid in performance ?

BURBAGE. Why, madam, if his ghost at performance be a tenth part as terrifying as his raging lion at rehearsal, we shall do well, very well—but our audience, I warrant you, shall go home quaking to bed.

DARK LADY. What, is gentle Will Shakespeare become a tyrant ?

BURBAGE. He has toiled overmuch at the midnight lamp—eh, Will ?

W. H. [*To* BURBAGE.] A man must be hale for this employ.

DARK LADY. In truth, sans chalk, sans powder, he looks the ghost to the life.

WILL. Do I so ? And yet in this ghost there is warm blood.

BURBAGE. Oh, I'll stake my head for the truth o' that. Half my company are in fear of their lives, my lord. [*To* SHAKESPEARE.] Dick Robinson now—the lad's for leaving his part.

WILL. Well, well ! Is it my affair ? You should have had the boy's hand and seal to perform what he undertook.

BURBAGE. Rest easy—I have it. By my troth, I believe he will play the Queen to the wonder of all who behold him.

WILL. Aye, and he knows it, the mincing mannikin ! Must I velvet my words for his vanity ? Would you have me flatter the fool ? Pooh—let him keep his womanishness in bounds !

BURBAGE. Men, too, have their feelings, Will.

DARK LADY. Or *have* they nothing but vanity ?

WILL. Poor Dick—I have used him knavishly—and you, Burbage, and all of them. . . . Pah ! I speak like an ass, for God knows I shall use you worse to-day.

BURBAGE. Scold at us, roar at us, do what you must—so it be short of tugging the playhouse about our ears—and we'll bear with you, Will, we'll bear with you. There's not a man here but loves you.

The STAGE-KEEPER *has entered, right.*

Ho, there ! Look alive ! All's ready for the graveyard ?

STAGE-KEEPER. Oh, sir ! Would you begin with that ?

BURBAGE. Aye, lad, and promptly. What did I tell you yesterday ? Are you losing your wits ? If we don't start with it we shall never come to that scene on this side of Doomsday. Why are Kemp and Armin not here ?

STAGE-KEEPER. They are rehearsing without, sir. And oh, sir, that Kemp, sir ! When you see him you'll not keep your countenance . . .

BURBAGE. Well, well—where is the bier ? What, man ? Ophelia's bier ! S'blood ! Must I do your work at the tail of my own ? Find the company stools. [*Exit, right, quickly.*

STAGE-KEEPER. Oh, I will, sir, I will.

[*He hurries to the back and produces three three-cornered stools which he places to the back of the stage, right.*

DARK LADY. Come, Will, I pray you—if it be but for pity of the company—put on a mask of merriment. I am so tired that I lack the strength to counterbalance your gloom.

WILL. I could rock the universe with laughter—had I one thing.

DARK LADY. Oh, I see you are past all cure.

WILL. It may be so. I think it.

[*They seat themselves on the stools. The* STAGE-KEEPER *withdraws, back.*

W. H. Man, man, hearken to me. What cause have you for complaint? How have you suffered but in the common hazard that may befall any man who throws at the dicing table of Cupid? Confront your losses, pay them like a man, and let those who are luckier play on while they have the stakes.

DARK LADY. If you would behave so, you would find us honest friends.

WILL. Honest, you say—honest? You were wiser to remain as you are, for I warn you that in this world an honest mind is every villain's football. Did I not love you, I could rail at your perfidy, but that's where I stick and that was the cause of my undoing. I loved you well, Proteus, and you stole her away by night.

DARK LADY. [*Rising.*] If you cannot be merrier, I will take my leave.

W. H. You are certainly giving us a sorry entertainment.

WILL. True, very true, most true. I will better it. I have done, I tell you, I have done, and you shall have entertainment that is worthy of your great

deserts. Why, look you, here comes Burbage—a figure of fun that would add grace to any country fair, a man who is fretting and fuming because, forsooth, he cannot find the grave !

[*Enter, right,* BURBAGE, *with the* STAGE-KEEPER *at his heels.*

BURBAGE. "Not well," quotha ! "Not well" three times in a week ! I'll not stomach it. Let him look to his agreement. The fellow's drunk, and he shall pay twice for his drink. Ten shillings from his wages—note that down !

STAGE-KEEPER. I would gladly prompt in his place.

BURBAGE. Are you stage-keeper or book-holder—which ? When you can perform your own office to my satisfaction 'twill be time enough to babble of taking on another's. The rogue shall pay for it. A pox on him !

STAGE-KEEPER. Yet, sir, would you have me prompt ?

BURBAGE. Well, there's naught else for it. Where's the script ?

STAGE-KEEPER. Oh, here, sir.

BURBAGE. To it, now, to it ! Bid Kemp and Armin attend. [*Exit* STAGE-KEEPER, *back.*

BURBAGE. [*To* SHAKESPEARE.] Truly, Kemp carries his clowning to an extreme. There was never a split-rib to match him. Why, Armin himself—an old hand at the trade, as you know—can keep his face no longer than the first line of the ditty. Past that, there's no holding him. I was watching them

with the edge of my eye; but, enough! you shall see them yourself.

WILL. [*Springing up.*] Stay, stay! We will have the Closet Scene.

BURBAGE. What, man? The Closet Scene?

WILL. "For I have heard
That guilty creatures, sitting at a play . . ."

[*Enter* KEMP *and* ARMIN, *followed by the* STAGE-KEEPER, *back.*

BURBAGE. But you saw it yesterday, and we had it all pat.

WILL. Not as I'd have it. The Closet Scene, I say! Where is Dick Robinson?

KEMP. Why, peacocking in the new finery for the Queen—pea-henning, I should say. Since ever it came, the boy's been strutting in it.

WILL. [*To the* STAGE-KEEPER.] Fetch him, fetch him. Away with you—prestissimo!

[*Exit the* STAGE-KEEPER *hurriedly.*

Burbage—your rapier! *I'll* show you how to play Hamlet.

BURBAGE. Come, Will, you have laurels enough. You are a great poet, man. In the playing, content yourself with my poor skill.

WILL. For once, I'll be actor too!

W. H. Well, even Homer nodded.

KEMP. True, sir—but he never snored.

WILL. Your rapier—for the Closet Scene.

W. H. Best humour him, Master Burbage.

BURBAGE. [*Giving* SHAKESPEARE *a rapier.*] As you will, my lord. Kemp, come you here.

[BURBAGE *takes the stool which* SHAKESPEARE *has vacated.* KEMP *squats at his side.* ARMIN *remains at the extreme left front of the stage, lying on the pine-twigs.*

DARK LADY. I pine for the clowning, Will.

WILL. Aye, madam, if that be the tune of your heart, you shall have it. You shall have your clowning anon.

[*Enter, back, the* STAGE-KEEPER, *followed by* DICK ROBINSON, *a highly-strung youth attired superbly as the Queen in "Hamlet."*

Ah, Dick Robinson—and so you are for throwing down your part!

ROBINSON. Marry, sir, you did so rage at me . . .

WILL. Perform it well now and I'll be your friend forever. [*Turning to the* DARK LADY.] Madam, let me present to you the Queen. I would have you well acquainted with one another. I would have you know this Queen, madam, as intimately as you know your looking-glass.

DARK LADY. Am I so rustical as not to know Dick Robinson?

WILL. Forget him. Contrive to see only a lady who has been most foully false. [*To the* STAGE-KEEPER.] You are ready?

STAGE-KEEPER. [*Producing the script.*] An it please you.

[*During the ensuing scene* BURBAGE *and* KEMP *inaudibly confer upon a certain scene, making references to passages in a script of the* FIRST GRAVE-DIGGER'S *part*

which KEMP *produces. From time to time they give tolerant attention to* SHAKESPEARE.]

WILL. [*To* ROBINSON.] Now, boy—you should stand here. [*Placing* ROBINSON *in position.*] And so I come to you. [*To* BURBAGE, *as he turns to go.*] Mark me, I say—and you, madam, mark me well. You shall see the very quintessence of "Hamlet."

SHAKESPEARE *goes out, right.*

DARK LADY. He is grown most strange.

W. H. I have seen him play a part well.

SHAKESPEARE *re-enters, in the part of* HAMLET.

WILL. "Now, madam, what's the matter?"

STAGE-KEEPER. [*Prompting.*] "Now, mother . . ."

WILL. Peace, peace!

STAGE-KEEPER. "Now, mother, what's the matter?"

WILL. I will say "madam." Would you hold up our action for a trifling word? [*To* ROBINSON.] To it!

ROBINSON. "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended."

WILL. Out with all that!

"Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you."

ROBINSON. "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?
Help, help, ho . . . !"

[*A pause.*

WILL. Where is Polonius? Condell—where's Condell?

BURBAGE. I told him he need not come.

WILL. Can we play the scene without Polonius?

BURBAGE. Armin or Kemp will do it.

WILL. Sit you down, both. I'll have none of you. Is not Polonius a grave man, a subtle intriguer? You, you, my lord—you shall play Polonius!

W. H. I, man?

WILL. The last of a thousand favours. I shall ask for no more. 'Tis but a matter of two lines—"What, ho, help, help," and, after, "O, I am slain."

W. H. But Armin . . .

WILL. [*Dragging* MR. W. H. *up stage to the curtain at the back.*] He has not the voice. Come, come, would you check the play for want of one to speak a few words and to die? [*He thrusts* MR. W. H. *behind the arras, back. To* ROBINSON.] Now, madam, cry your "help."

ROBINSON. "Help, help, ho!"

W. H. [*Behind the arras.*] "What, ho, help, help, help!"

WILL. [*Drawing his rapier and rushing to the arras.*]

"How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!"

[*He plunges the rapier repeatedly through the arras.*

BURBAGE. Have a care, Will!

WILL. [*Continuing his thrusts.*] Come, sir, your cue—"O, I am slain!" . . . Is there no killing the

fellow ? [*He draws back the arras.* MR. W. H. *is no longer behind it.*] Vanished ! . . . Not even that ! . . .

[*Quietly.*] "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell !
I took thee for thy better ; take thy fortune ;
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger."

[*He laughs a little wildly, then turns to the* DARK LADY.

WILL. How like you the play, madam ? You find it tedious ?

DARK LADY. A little, by your leave. Shall we soon have Kemp and the clowning ?

WILL. Soon, soon—yet bear with us to the end.

DARK LADY. Willingly ; but the day draws on, and by dusk I would fain be in bed.

WILL. Fear not. We will give you matter to sleep on. [*Returning to* ROBINSON.]

"Leave wringing of your hands ; peace, sit you down,
And let me wring your heart ; for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff ;
If damned custom have not brass'd it so,
That it be proof and bulwark against sense."

ROBINSON. "What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me ? "

WILL. [*Half turning to the* DARK LADY.]
" Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there ; O, such a deed . . ."

STAGE-KEEPER. " Makes marriage vows . . ."

WILL. Silence ! They're not i' the fashion . . .
" O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words ; heaven's face doth glow ;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With twistful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act."

ROBINSON. " Ay me, what act,
That roars so loud and thunders in the index ? "

WILL. " Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two "—friends.
Break not in upon me—I care not for the words.

The counterfeit presentment of two friends whereof was one that loved thee so well, so profoundly, that with his love in thy heart thou mightst have plumbed all mysteries; but him hast thou spurned away to follow that other — a painted image, a gilded mockery, a lovely and hollow eidolon, whose heart is a nest for the viper-brood of treachery!

"What devil was't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
O shame! where is thy blush? . . .
Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason pandars will."

ROBINSON. "O Hamlet, speak no more:
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct."

WILL. [*Muttering as he glances at the* DARK LADY.] Is it so indeed?

"Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty . . ."

ROBINSON. " O speak to me no more ;
These words like daggers enter in my ears ;
No more, sweet Hamlet ! "

[*The* DARK LADY *seems to sigh deeply.*

WILL. " Confess yourself to heaven . . ."

STAGE-KEEPER. Nay, sir—with all respect—here are whole pages ousted, and the ghost ignored . . .

WILL. [*Turning on him furiously.*] Check me not again or I swear you shall play the ghost in earnest ! Away with you ! Home to your dinner ! I'll have no more of you. Out, out !

[*The* STAGE-KEEPER *quails before him and disappears rapidly, right.*

WILL. " Confess yourself to heaven ;
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good."

ROBINSON. " O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain."

WILL. " O throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Assume a virtue if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery,
That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence ; the next more easy ;
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And either tame the devil, or throw him out
With wondrous potency . . .
One more word, good lady."

ROBINSON. " What shall I do ? "

WILL. " Not this, by no means, that I bid you do :
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed ;
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse ;
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,

Or paddling in your neck with his
damn'd fingers . . ."

[*The* DARK LADY'S *head falls back against a supporting wall.*

Ah, God ! I have done too well !

BURBAGE. She has swooned ?

DARK LADY. [*Opening her eyes.*] Swooned ? Not I, Master Burbage. 'Twas my drowsiness overcame me.

WILL. What—you slept ?

DARK LADY. Your ranting, Will, was so tedious. With Burbage it had been different. And now, cry you mercy, let's have Kemp.

WILL. Kemp—I have failed to entertain this lady. I shall not try again. I have tried too long. Do you present the ditty of which we have heard such tales—and so make our amends.

[KEMP *and* ARMIN *squat in front of the arras.* BURBAGE *and the* DARK LADY *bring their stools forward so that they are almost backing to the audience.*

[ROBINSON *shifts the throne so that he too is looking towards the arras.*

[SHAKESPEARE *moves to the corner, front left, which* ARMIN *had vacated.*

KEMP. [*Singing.*]

" In youth, when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet,
To contract, O, the time, for-a my
behove,

O, methought, there-a was nothing-a meet.

[*The company breaks out in laughter. The* DARK LADY *claps her hands.*

[*Enter, right,* MR. W. H. *and the* STAGE-KEEPER. *They join* BURBAGE *and the* DARK LADY, *so that* SHAKESPEARE *is left in isolation, the rest having their backs to him.*

"But age, with his stealing steps,
Hath claw'd me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me intil the land,
As if I had never been such."

[*The company laughs again.*

DARK LADY. O, the knave has no mercy! He'll kill me!

KEMP. [*Singing.*]

"A pick-axe, a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet:
O, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet."

[*The company applauds heartily.* SHAKESPEARE *snaps the rapier across his knee.*

EPISODE IV

1608

CHARACTERS

MADAME MONTJOY, *an Huguenot refugee, middle-aged.*
RICHARD BURBAGE, *the actor, now aged* 41.
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *aged* 44.
BEN JONSON, *the poet, aged* 35.
JUDITH, *Shakespeare's daughter, aged* 24.

EPISODE IV

SCENE : *A Spring evening in* 1608. *The back-parlour in the dwelling of* CHRISTOPHER MONTJOY, *a wig-maker, in Silver Street, Cheapside. Left, an entrance leading into the shop. Right, another leading to a further room.*

As the Curtain rises, MADAME MONTJOY *is leading* RICHARD BURBAGE *into the parlour from the door, left. She carries a wig.*

MME. MONTJOY. By here, Master Burbage, by here. In this room no one comes. Here you shall try the wig. Mon Dieu, but we have work at her ! You shall say, " Ah ! how she is superb ! " [*She gives the wig to* BURBAGE, *and quickly brings him a hand-mirror.*] No ? Superb !

BURBAGE. Cunningly made, madame—yet I would it were somewhat higher. This Timon was a person of great import.

MME. MONTJOY. We can perhaps make it more large.

BURBAGE. Nay, now I look on it closely, methinks 'twill serve.

MME. MONTJOY. Ah ! Did I not say you shall be pleased ?

BURBAGE. Aye—'twill serve. Madame Montjoy, I trust that when you and the good Mounseer shall see me in the part of Timon you may be as well pleased with my work as I am with yours.

MME. MONTJOY. You are so good ! And Timon he was a grand lord ?

BURBAGE. A great man who came to nothing.

MME. MONTJOY. You say it ? Ah, how Will Shakespeare is melancholic ! All his grand lords they come to nothing. That poor Antony ! That poor king—old Lear ! Heigh-o !

BURBAGE. Would God I could hit on the knack to cheer Will Shakespeare ! We are old friends now, he and I. In youth we make friends at every tavern, but in the middle season of life we find most men are too young or too opinionated. And yet though I go to him never so kindly he will brush me away with scarce a word. The pity of it ! Troth, 'twas a great ado I had merely to learn that he was once more lodging with you.

MME. MONTJOY. When he came first—it is five years ago now—he was often heavy, but then if my daughter would play on her virginal and sing an old song of France, hey ! He would grow easy. But now ! Ah, sir, though she is married now, she comes here ever and anon and will sing in the room up yonder, but Will he mope in a corner—he sigh

as though his heart should break. I have never know him so sad.

BURBAGE. He did well to come back to your roof. There is kindness here. Oh, a pox on that woman, that she-devil! She went back to the country when the old Queen died, and I praised God for it . . . and yet, of a truth, she had done her work and left her damn'd poison in Will's mind.

MME. MONTJOY. The lady? The court-lady? Oh, you men think always of the women!

BURBAGE. [*With a bow.*] Sometimes, madame, we cannot choose.

MME. MONTJOY. Ah, sir! . . . But Will Shakespeare think no more of women. An he would, he might find soon a medicine. That lady? Bah! she is for him—dead!

BURBAGE. Ods life! He's forgotten her? After all the torment he suffered?

MME. MONTJOY. Forget her? Perhaps no; but now his trouble is deeper.

BURBAGE. What ails him?

MME. MONTJOY. But who can tell? He cries out against all the world. He hate women, he hate men, he hate life. How he will rage against his old friends—calling them traitor, liar, fool, hypocrite! Poor Will, he is sick!

BURBAGE. Very sick. Methinks, he will write no more. His wit grows poorer. "Troilus" and "Timon"—what are these plays but the windy wrack of an autumn that follows too early on a summer of glory? That Will should be failing now—at two-score years and four, when his power should

ride the meridian : and when too, as I sorely fear, his name is like to be jostled aside by the names of new men, as Chapman, Heywood, Webster and the terrible big Ben.

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, that Ben !—I detest him ! How he scorns Will !

BURBAGE. And not Will only. When Master Jonson begins to lay about him 'tis good as a fair day for broken pates !

MME. MONTJOY. 'Tis a big fool, your big Ben.

BURBAGE. He has spoken vilely of Will.

MME. MONTJOY. And I tell you, Will loves him. I know, I know. He may fly at the name of Master Jonson, but he loves him.

BURBAGE. Hark you ! Someone has entered the shop.

MME. MONTJOY. It can be Will. I go to see. Pray you, sir, speak with him. [*She goes to the door, left, and opens it.*] Ah, you come, you come—*à la bonne heure.* Master Burbage is here in the wig of your Timon.

[*Enter* SHAKESPEARE. *His manner is heavy and listless. He greets* BURBAGE *with the slightest of nods, and sits down on the nearest chair.* BURBAGE, *who has discarded the wig, resumes it.*

BURBAGE. Now, Will—what think you of this ? Had it not been the better for a little more ostentation ?

WILL. Maybe.

BURBAGE. For Timon, after all, was a towering, swaggering, splendiferous fellow at the first.

WILL. More ostentation ? Aye. 'Tis what the world loves—and who are we that we should not pander to the folly and filth of mankind ? We too are men. Let us frankly admit our shame. Let us contrive an unparalleled feast of offal for the swine, our dear fellow-creatures.

BURBAGE. Be counselled by a friend, Will . . .

WILL. By what ?

BURBAGE. An old friend and a true well-wisher . . .

WILL. Phrases, phrases ! I have no friends. To me you are nothing but a player—and who should feign better than he whose top wish is to flatter the lordlings ?

BURBAGE. Why, man, is not the world a stage and all the men and women merely players ?

WILL. Nay, 'tis a brothel—and all the men and women mere cut-throats and strumpets.

BURBAGE. How, then, of your new piece ? Have you made a cut-throat of Pericles ?

WILL. I can make nothing of him, nothing. I have stretched my invention to the last peg, and vainly. Oh, Dick, how should I write well-favouredly in a world that is all corruption, double-dealing, lies and lechery—a tournament where he that brays loudest can make sure of the laurels ? I am spent. I shall write no more.

BURBAGE. Oh, it rakes my heart to hear you !

WILL. Doubtless ! I was your hen that laid the golden eggs.

BURBAGE. Will, man !

WILL. I see through you all. You loved me for what you might get of me. Now there is nothing to

get, and if you will be advised by me you will waste no more of your time.

BURBAGE. Old friend, I am sorry indeed for this. What can I do but pray for your speedy recovery? Fare you well—and you, too, Madame Montjoy. Pray send the wig to the Globe.

[*Exit, left.*

[SHAKESPEARE *remains motionless in the chair.*

MME. MONTJOY. You have been for a walk in the Moorfields? All the flowers can have burgeoned by now?

WILL. I was not there.

MME. MONTJOY. Not there? And yet you were not at the Mermaid.

WILL. How know you that? I see. You begin to spy on my movements.

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, but you do not mean that? I was in Bread Street, a-visiting my good friend Mistress Milton, the wife of the scrivener, and as I came home by the Mermaid I thought it no harm to peep at the fine company.

WILL. No harm? Perhaps not—for you.

MME. MONTJOY. That dear Mistress Milton! She looks to have a baby in December, and will prattle of it so prettily withal. The child will have a sweet mother.

WILL. You are glad that men breed. Strange! . . . And the Mermaid, was . . . ? Who was there?

MME. MONTJOY. Why, Masters Fletcher and Rowley and Marston and Webster and—oh, yes, Master Ford alone in a corner.

WILL. No other ?

MME. MONTJOY. He was not there—Ben Jonson.

WILL. What's that to me ?

MME. MONTJOY. He have not been there, they tell, for three days past. I think he find it so dull without you.

WILL. And how do you think he has spent his three days ? I will tell you, for I can guess. Writing : writing taunts : vile taunts at me !

MME. MONTJOY. He is hot, I know, but he cools quickly.

WILL. Let me never hear of him more—the puffed-up bully, the ingrate ! He climbed to renown on my shoulders. I noted his merit when no man would turn his pages, they were so cumbered with useless learning. And now he would handle us all as though we were school children and he our pedant. Because *he* will build a play, as he once built walls—brick by brick, to the chart in his hand—he would have it that all we are fools who think to bring forth our plays by the rule of nature—as things that breathe and move. Enough of him ! I will never give him a thought, and you—never speak of him again ! Indeed, you will not have occasion.

MME. MONTJOY. Poor man ! It is that you do not sleep. But first you will have a good supper and then, as I hope, sweet music. For Mary shall come here anon.

WILL. Music ? It has no place in this world. Give me rather a sheet of paper that I may set down the discords that jangle about my ears.

MME. MONTJOY. In your room there is always paper. You go to write more of your Pericles ?

WILL. I go to write my Will.

MME. MONTJOY. Your testament ? Oh, please, please ! I know where you walk.

WILL. What ?

MME. MONTJOY. I am told that you enter the shop of a chymist.

WILL. Very true. I must sleep.

MME. MONTJOY. He has give you . . . ? Will, Will !

WILL. I must sleep. Have you not told me so a score of times ?

MME. MONTJOY. But I know it—what you intend.

WILL. To-night I think I *shall* sleep. [*Exit, right.*

[MADAME MONTJOY *stands irresolute and in despair. She hears the street-door close.*

MME. MONTJOY. Mary is come ! Thank God ! [*A soft knock on the door, left.*] Who is it, then ?

[*Enter* BEN JONSON, *brusquely, but with a certain stealth.*

BEN. Where is he ?

MME. MONTJOY. Master Jonson !

BEN. Ch, ch, ch !

MME. MONTJOY. I had thought you was my daughter.

BEN. Ha, ha, ha-ha, ha ! Methinks I'd make a strapping wench.

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, tell me, tell me—what must we do ? Will Shakespeare !

BEN. Good madam, give me a cordial. I've rid hard.

MME. MONTJOY. But, sir . . . !

BEN. Give me a cordial! [MADAME MONTJOY *hastens to a cupboard.*] And see to it that he enters not while I'm here. [*She fills a glass and hands it to* BEN.] Now—what's amiss? Your health! [*He drinks.*

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, Master Ben, he is terrible! He mean to kill himself. He makes a testament—now, now!

BEN. Pooh! Let him write his testament. As for the killing—he'll not do it.

MME. MONTJOY. You have not seen him so long. He never sleep, never! And the poison, he has it.

BEN. Eh? What?

MME. MONTJOY. Go to him. Speak him a kind word. I beg! You can do so much.

BEN. Nay, when the fit passes, let him first find out me! What say the fishwives of London? It needs two to make a quarrel—and I'll cringe to no man. Passion o' me, I'd sooner eat dung.

MME. MONTJOY. Master Jonson, he is desperate. You should help him—you have given him such hurts with your writing.

BEN. Is the man a child to squeal at a knock? I say but what I think—and I ever abhorred a mealy-mouth'd mincer of words.

MME. MONTJOY. Can you say nothing kind to Will that is not a falsehood?

BEN. I could say much, but the brainless flattery of the small fry who would set him up as our foremost provokes me to the contrary. And what have I said? They come to me with their "Look you, he scarce ever blots a line," and if I answer that "I

would he had blotted a thousand"—why, marry, so I would! He's arrogant, madam. S'death, he fancies that a handful of mother-wit can furnish out his vacuum of scholarship. His Latin—I babbled as much at my mother's apron; his Greek—'tis not sufficient to cover a pin's head. He'll not be guided, I say. Moreover, he writes too much.

MME. MONTJOY. You rail at him, but I know you. For all your high learning, you've a heart like other men.

BEN. Eh? And a liver, too—the Devil take it!

MME. MONTJOY. The poison! If he drink it—now as we talk! God must have send you. Help me!

BEN. Another glass, by your leave. . . . Madame Montjoie, when last I came here—though in truth I had better business—you babbled much of Will Shakespeare's gloom. 'Twas nothing to me, mark you—nothing; and I lent you but the periphery of my understanding. Yet I fancy you told of a girl, his daughter, in Stratford — eh? — and how he quickened at nothing but the memory of this girl. Well, well?

MME. MONTJOY. His daughter Judith. If he can go to Stratford, but no! He has no more of energy.

BEN. Answer me to the point! Does he think of the girl still?

MME. MONTJOY. He speaks of her yesterday.

BEN. Ha!

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, Master Jonson, she could perhaps have cure him—but what use to think it? Ah, when he came from Stratford the last time he

did speak of her with a tenderness how deep ! She is for him like a flower of the country—but she is far away. Who knows ? If he can have seen her . . . !

BEN. He shall see her.

MME. MONTJOY. Impossible. I say, he will never go.

BEN. Would you cross me ? I say, he shall see her.

MME. MONTJOY. Too late. To Stratford and back —'tis a three days' riding at best.

BEN. But I tell you, madame, the wench is already here.

MME. MONTJOY. Here ?

BEN. An arrant country simpleton ! I never came on her match.

MME. MONTJOY. You have ridden to Stratford ? You have brought her ? Oh, Master Ben, did I say it you have a heart of gold !

BEN. Now, now, now—peace to your foreign hyperbole, or I'll be gone.

MME. MONTJOY. Stay ! The girl . . . ?

BEN. Hard by at my lodgment—the puling ignorant quean ! Give me a wench that's half boy. The fluttered fool !

MME. MONTJOY. Fool ?

BEN. Aye, madam—fool. Nothing will persuade her that I do not mean to despoil her honour.

MME. MONTJOY. You have not tell her that she comes to her father ?

BEN. Pooh ! I have told her, but think you that she'll believe it ? And, marry, 'tis an odd enough method of making such a visit. I rid to Stratford, enquired for Will's house (a fine house, too), and by

grace of the Goddess Fortuna spoke first with the wench herself at the door: told her that she must come post to London, muttered a word of her father's ill state and, while she was yet at her "Oh, sirs" and "buts," clapped her before me on the nag and whipped on. You should have heard her screaming "A rape, a rape!" And Lord, what a hue and cry came after! At night we rested at Oxford with some good friends of mine, and this morning with, oh, what a pother, I brought her to London and my lodgment! There's the story, and my part in it's done: but the girl will not credit me till she set eyes on Will.

MME. MONTJOY. The poor lamb! How you have terrified her!

BEN. I'll be glad when I hear the poor lamb bleating no longer.

MME. MONTJOY. Bring her quickly, and I'll go tell Master Will. . . .

BEN. Not a word of it! What? Do you hear? I'll have the girl tell her own tale. If you utter a syllable, if you make a sign, if you give a nod, to Will, I swear I'll—he is not to guess I had part in it.

MME. MONTJOY. I'll do your bidding. I'll say not a word. Do you but bring the maid quickly!

WILL. [*Heard from without.*] Mistress Montjoy!

MME. MONTJOY. He is coming!

BEN. Pooh! Then I go. I'll fetch her round in a trice. [*Exit, left.*

[*Before* MADAME MONTJOY *has returned from the door enter* SHAKESPEARE, *right.*

WILL. You are still here. That's well.

MME. MONTJOY. And wholly at your service.

WILL. Hark you: I have writ my will, as I intended, for none of us can lay head to pillow with assurance that he shall wake. I would sleep. I would sleep at once and for long; and I come to tell you that to-night I shall take no supper, and to beg of you that no one shall disturb me.

MME. MONTJOY. Master Will, do it not—I pray you!

WILL. And this paper I give to your keeping. . . .

MME. MONTJOY. I will not touch it. I know what you mean. You have purchased death of the chymist.

WILL. And if I had? The devil who set the world a-jogging delays the epilogue too long. The jest begins to stale, and I at least will caper to his tune no more.

MME. MONTJOY. Rest here for a little, Master Will—for a half-hour.

WILL. And then another and then another, and so from day to day. . . . Not I. First, put this paper in a handy box, and, after, go forth—seek out your daughter Mary. Is she not a woman? Does she not live in London? It is your duty to keep an eye on her.

MME. MONTJOY. That paper—what have you written?

WILL. I have paid what I owe you. Expect no more.

MME. MONTJOY. Oh, Will! But sit you down and read it to me, for there is often much wrangling about a will. Teach me your full intent.

WILL. There'll be no wrangling, I warrant you, for the goods that *I* have bequeathed! You shall hear the will, and pronounce an opinion. So it runs—[*Reading*]—*The last will and testament of me, Thersites Modernus, alias Timon of Cheapside, alias William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon—gentleman, though the son of a butcher and thereto the fool of Fortune. For the trash, my worldly wealth, I bequeathe it to whomsoever can most excel in the fashionable employ of gilding a ladder to office and preferment. For my plays, I desire them a fitter audience than they shall find in a world where truth is betrayed and beauty strumpeted as certainly as the unblushing sun rises and sets. To my fellow writers I bequeathe my reputation, desiring them to smutch and belittle it to their hearts' content: to every woman I would leave six lovers for the six days of the week, and for Sundays a rich and uxorious wittol: to every man, the ability to push, lie, pander and oppress, for by these he shall climb to honour. And lastly, to the Evil Spirit who devised the world of men I leave my malediction and therewith, like Job aforetime, I do curse the day that I was born and do give my soul, together with my body, most willingly to the worms.* Bring me a light and I'll seal this. Then—to my purpose.

MME. MONTJOY. Not yet, not yet! Would you leave me nothing?

WILL. You are first here. Forestall the vultures. Take what you will. What is it?

MME. MONTJOY. I know not. . . . Some little remembrance of a friend cruel, unjust.

WILL. Men, men ! They would snatch at the very coin in Charon's hand !

[MADAME MONTJOY *is arrested by the sound of voices in the room off left.*

MME. MONTJOY. Someone is in the shop . . . Will. You promise ? You will stay here till I come ? You promise ? I would tell you what thing I ask for. . . .

WILL. Despatch your business quickly.

[MADAME MOUNTJOY *hastens out, left.*

[SHAKESPEARE *sinks into a chair and stares absently at the floor. The spring evening has begun to close in. After a moment* MADAME MOUNTJOY *ushers in* JUDITH SHAKESPEARE, *and immediately withdraws.* JUDITH *is greatly frightened and, remaining close to the door, left, falls on her knees and hides her face.*

WILL. " To die, to sleep ;
To sleep ; perchance to dream ;
ay, there's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what
dreams may come. . . ."

Dick Burbage, I hear you speaking it—now ! Who's there—weeping ? [JUDITH *does not reply.*] Well, you have cause for tears : you are a parcel of the world. Who are you, child ? [*No answer.*] What would you here ? [*No answer.* SHAKESPEARE *rises and goes over to her.*] What ! Is it possible ? Judith ?

JUDITH. [*Looking up.*] Father, father! Then the rough man spoke truth!

[*She runs into his arms.*

WILL. Dear heart—how came you? Who was it worked this wonder?

JUDITH. A dreadful huge fellow. He snatched me from home yesterday—aye, it was yesterday—just as I was about to go marketing. Here is my money—look! And he said you were sick, but how should I believe his story? I thought . . .

WILL. Why, what did you think?

JUDITH. That I was in the house of a harlot. How should I know? That woman—she is your Madame Montjoy? Who made the honey-cakes for your birthday last year? I have wronged her in my heart, but, oh! I was frightened!

WILL. And did the huge fellow swear mightily?

JUDITH. Every yard of the way!

WILL. I guessed it!

JUDITH. And he was right—you are sick. Oh, let me make you well—for I know I am simple and have no skill in books, but I do love you strangely. And when you were last in Stratford, were you not happy with me—as we passed through the green cornfields? I thought so. Take me to Stratford—soon, soon! The meadows there are covered with cowslips, and the oaks are beginning to leaf. And in the copses there are primroses and violets—hundreds and hundreds. They look to be so happy that whenever I catch their eyes I grow happy, too. O the world, the world—what a pretty place it is! Am I too simple to be your companion? [SHAKESPEARE,

released suddenly from a prolonged strain, breaks down.]

Father—my dear !

[*From an upper room* MADAME MONTJOY'S *daughter is heard singing.*

THE VOICE.

" Hark ! hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies ;
And winking Marybuds begin
To ope their golden eyes :
With everything that pretty bin,
My lady sweet, arise."

JUDITH. Take me to Stratford ! You will ?

WILL. Ah, Judith—*you* shall take *me !*

THE VOICE. [*Singing to the end.*]

" Arise, arise,
My lady sweet, arise."

[SHAKESPEARE *tears into small pieces the* " *last will of Thersites Modernus.*"

EPISODE V

1616

CHARACTERS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *aged* 51.
FRANCIS COLLINS, *a solicitor from Warwick.*
ANNE SHAKESPEARE, *the poet's wife, aged* 59.
JUDITH SHAKESPEARE, *now aged* 31.
A YOUNG POET.

EPISODE V

SCENE : *The principal living-room at New Place, Stratford-on-Avon. Centre back, a nail-studded oak door which leads into the garden. To either side of it a casement window with three lights divided by mullions. Left, a door from the rest of the house. Right, an open fireplace.*

TIME : *January*, 1616.

Beside the fireplace a table at which, facing the auditorium, SHAKESPEARE *sits. He looks grey and broken. To his left, facing the fire, sits* FRANCIS COLLINS, *his solicitor, a man in the middle forties. On the table are legal papers, an ink-horn, a sandbox and a quill. Near to* SHAKESPEARE *stands a broad silver gilt bowl.*

WILL. And now, Master Collins, I think I have disposed of everything.

COLLINS. Stay, sir. Have you not some share in the playhouse at London ?

WILL. I sold it last year.

COLLINS. Ah ? And did well of it, I'll warrant—a most marketable commodity ; for though times are changing and every other man in our district has become a Puritan, I hear that the fine folk of London continue to relish their sports. 'Twould have made a fat legacy for one or another.

WILL. My share in the playhouse ? I would not have bestowed it upon the least of my friends.

COLLINS. [*Laughing.*] Oh, sir—you are pleasant. [SHAKESPEARE *looks puzzled.* COLLINS *recollects the will.*] I pray you, pardon my unseemly mirth. Wit is so rare in these parts. Why, then, Master Shakespeare—seeing that you also write no longer—we may say of you that you neither get gold from the stage nor give it. Ah, talent, talent—what a blessing it is ! To be a playwright, as I hear tell, may be well nigh as profitable as to be a player—but, troth ! 'Tis little I know of such matters.

WILL. You are much to be envied.

COLLINS. [*Laughing.*] Yet again, sir ! Truly, your London wit has taken no rust from the Warwickshire fields. " Envied ! " The Court and your playhouse—were they not equally the haunt of fashion ? And have you not mixed with the bravest company in that great town ?

WILL. True enough.

COLLINS. You know me, sir, for a plain man of law, yet I'll venture to think that I could have laughed with the best of you. Marry, you should have heard some rare bouts of wit.

WILL. Long ago . . . at the Mermaid, aye, at the Mermaid. . . . 'Tis all nothing now . . . and Ben himself, great-hearted Ben, a figure in a dream. . . . [*With a shudder.*] A lewd and violent dream—a pageant of monsters and grinning masks!

COLLINS. But, sir, had it nothing goodly?

WILL. Aye. There were honest and clean spirits among my fellows—Condell and Dick Burbage and Heminges. I would that they might think on me sometimes when I am gone.

COLLINS. Easy enough, Master Shakespeare. A few shillings out of your residue . . .

WILL. I had rather live in their memory by a few kind deeds. Nevertheless, they shall have the shillings.

COLLINS. Sufficient to purchase them rings, eh, sir? A like sum with Masters Antony and John?

[*He makes a note to that effect.*

WILL. I find this will-making a matter more burdensome than I had thought for. Perhaps I am near the end. This obscure longing to be remembered after death—it is something new to me. Moreover, my memory—even as my sight—begins to wane. I trust that I have done well with the property.

COLLINS. Sir, you have been most generous—generous to a fault. [*Fidgeting and clearing his throat.*] We have now to deal only with—with the marriage portion for Mistress Judith.

WILL. We will put that question aside.

COLLINS. Yet, if I may make so bold—Oh, 'tis not for me to sway your judgment. Nay, after

twenty years' practice in the profession, I trust that I know my place. But, Master Shakespeare—as an old friend of the family, I venture to suggest on behalf of Mistress Judith . . .

WILL. We will put that question aside.

COLLINS. A single word, of your courtesy! 'Tis plain to see that on some count the young man has grievously vexed you. Now, sir, I would fain commend him to you upon three considerations: the first, that in all Stratford there is no man enjoys a sweeter reputation than young Master Thomas Quiney; the second, that he is the son of your old friend; the third, and with *you* perhaps the weightiest, that he is a man of parts, of a pretty wit and, as I hear, of some skill in the turning of a verse . . .

WILL. No more of it, Master Collins.

COLLINS. As you will, sir. No offence, I hope. But to find Mistress Judith in tears, and the young man himself as dejected as though his marriage-bells would be robbed of half their music . . . Very good, sir—I have done.

WILL. The young pair have an eloquent spokesman, but my quarrel with Thomas Quiney . . .

COLLINS. Misunderstanding, sir. If you would but accept me as mediator . . .

WILL. My daughter, sir, has taken that office upon herself, and there is none who might more potently prevail upon me. You did not omit my bequest to her of this bowl?

COLLINS. It is duly entered. A fine piece of silver-craft!

WILL. I purchased it when I left London. My daughter was with me. . . .

[*Enter, left,* ANNE SHAKESPEARE—*a sour-faced woman, some eight years older than her husband.*

WILL. I think you know my wife, sir ?

COLLINS. [*Rising and bowing.*] Your servant, madam.

ANNE. [*Nodding to him curtly, and then turning to* SHAKESPEARE.] Will, there's a fellow without—rid from London—desires to speak with you.

WILL. From London ? Who is he ?

ANNE. He'll not give his name—says you'd be none the wiser.

COLLINS. I will not detain you . . .

WILL. Indeed, I trust you will stay for dinner.

COLLINS. [*Glancing apprehensively at* ANNE.] Were it not that I fear to put you out . . .

WILL. Anne, you will not let Master Collins ride back to Warwick without bite or sup ?

ANNE. If he care to stay, we can provide.

WILL. We can make him welcome, I hope.

COLLINS. I shall be much beholden to you for your hospitality. In the meanwhile, I will not obstruct your visitor. [*He begins to collect his papers.*

WILL. Perhaps you would care to walk in my garden, sir ? The snowdrops are out already.

ANNE. What should he do in a garden at this time o' year ?

WILL. 'Tis January—true—but the sun is like April.

COLLINS. Moreover, I carry the happiest recollections of your garden and shall most gladly improve my acquaintance. [*He puts the papers into his bag.*

WILL. I cannot deny the stranger.

ANNE. Then, first drink your physic.

[*She produces a bottle and proceeds to give him a dose.*

WILL. [*Cup in hand.*] Sour stuff, Master Collins, but in time we all come to the doctor.

ANNE. You'll not be abusing the doctor, I hope.

COLLINS. Well, sir, I shall see you anon.

[*Exit, back centre.*

ANNE. Pray, close the door quickly. I will fetch the young man.

WILL. A moment! Is Judith home yet?

ANNE. [*Pausing at door, left.*] Not that I've seen. I wonder you care to ask—when you've well nigh broken the chit's heart with your peevish obduracy.

WILL. We will not discuss it again, Anne.

ANNE. La! How you try my patience!

[*Exit, left.*

[SHAKESPEARE *rises and moves to the window, back right. He stands there, looking at his garden. The door, left, is opened by* ANNE.

[*Enter a* YOUNG POET. ANNE *withdraws.*

POET. Master Shakespeare!

WILL. [*Turning.*] Heigh? Ah, the young man from London.

POET. [*Dramatically, as he pauses, halfway across the room.*] Sir, I could do off my shoes, like another Moses, for I tread upon holy ground.

WILL. I pray you, do no such thing. May I learn your name ?

POET. I am a poet ; but when you left London I had writ nothing, and my name would not be known to you.

WILL. At least you will take a chair ?

POET. Oh, thank you ! [*They seat themselves by the window, back left, but during the following scene the* YOUNG POET *frequently rises and walks about the room.*] I scarce know how to speak to you.

WILL. Are we not both Englishmen ?

POET. I had meant, sir, that my veneration for you is so profound. I cannot tell you how often I have dreamed of the moment when I should stand face to face with the mightiest of all poets !

WILL. [*Gently.*] Pardon me. I am an old man now and have no stomach for the libations of language. Be so good as to broach your matter simply.

POET. Let me then first persuade you of my intense admiration—I would fain say " adoration "—of your peerless plays !

WILL. You need persuade me no further.

POET. And then, sir, a word of my qualifications.

WILL. For what office ?

POET. I will touch on that soon, but before I speak of it I desire you to know that I am a scholar of Oxford and thereto, though in all humility, a votary of the Muses.

WILL. Well, sir ?

POET. Indeed, I have written a play which . . . But I tremble to speak it, for a man's friends are flattering judges. Why, sir, the truth is that my

play is thought to bear a likeness to some of your own. 'Twas entitled "The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street."

WILL. "The Puritan?"

POET. You have heard of it?

WILL. In Stratford we live obscurely.

POET. Yet I dare to think you would relish it, so unmercifully does it mock at the knaves!

WILL. What knaves?

POET. Why, the Puritans!

WILL. Are they more knavish than you or I?

POET. Master Shakespeare! Puritans! *Puritans!*

WILL. They have their faults—but, I pray you, unfold your purpose.

POET. Then, sir, you must understand that ever since the lamentable fire at the Globe Playhouse I have been oppressed by the most powerful and hideous apprehension.

WILL. You should consult a doctor.

POET. But, sir, do you realise that your manuscripts, your inestimable manuscripts, might all have perished in that disaster? [SHAKESPEARE *remains unmoved.*] Perished! I implore you to consider how, until they be imprinted, they can have no security. Some, it is true, have been uttered by the printer—but in a form how woefully mangled: most, and among them your sublimest achievements, repose in the custody of players who cannot appreciate their full value. Sir, conceive me justly—I would not cast a slight upon any man who has been honoured by your esteem. Burbage, Heminges and the rest—they are worthy fellows, but only a poet can understand

a poet. At any moment, by some rude chance, the whole treasury of your wit and invention may be lost to the world forever. In good faith, I cannot sleep for the thought.

WILL. There I can feel for you; time was when I could not sleep.

POET. From that same cause, sir?

WILL. Not from that cause.

POET. And yet, sir, it is at night that such terrors overcome us; and henceforward, surely, you will not rest until we have begun to put my project into action?

WILL. I hope to sleep well of nights—while I live.

POET. I perceive that I must throw my matter into rough-cast phrase. Old age and even death, sir, will often steal upon a man while he is yet relishing in full the flavour of his youth. The Progeny of your pen are indeed immortal; and I pray most fervently that you yourself may continue for many years to enjoy the world . . .

WILL. I thank you, but your prayers will prove vain. I have no long lease of life.

POET. Oh, what a day would that be!

WILL. A day like any other day, I assure you. Earthquakes will not signal my departure. There will be no comets to herald me on my way.

POET. And afterwards? Bequeathe your plays to the world in a form that may do them justice! I should inform you, sir, that Master Jonson, though yet in his midsummer of strength, is even now considering his own works to a like end. His plays are to be collected and issued in one great volume—

carefully overseen by the poet himself; and I come, sir, to beseech you, in the name of posterity, not to do less for your own—for plays which many among us consider to be of a value higher than his, plays which, in our belief, are likely to prove the grandest achievements of all time. If you lack vigour for the enterprise, I would offer my humble service—contented and proud to perform the most arduous portions of the work, intruding upon you only in points of doubt, and this with no further reward than the gratitude of unborn generations. I warrant you, sir, it would be a labour of love.

WILL. Good friend, in every disinterested action there is beauty. I thank you for your zeal, but I must impress upon you that you urge me in vain.

POET. Oh, sir—your reason? I swear I shall prove it groundless.

WILL. I have no reason.

POET. Sir, you confound me!

WILL. I am swayed by something mightier than reason. You do not know me.

POET. Oh, Master Shakespeare, your pardon! For all that I had not seen the light before you were already renowned and that before this hour I had never set eyes on you, I dare to say that I know you more than well—as intimately as though I had been your closest fellow from youth upward. Your poems, your plays and your sonnets—I have read them with understanding. I know you with my heart.

WILL. You know me as I have been—and I have been many things.

POET. True—most true. In "Love's Labour's Lost" I know you as you were at the outset of life—careless and gay and wild as a morning of April. In "Romeo and Juliet" I see you as you were in young manhood, your merriment tempered with pity, your freedom constrained by the gyves of love. In "Hamlet" I find you a man who perceives that the world is crazy and will not be cured. In "Timon" that humour has become a passion, a loathing of mankind and a hopelessness for the world, from which it seems that imagination can totter only into madness. At last — in "The Tempest"—I watch you making peace with your fellows, forgiving them their evil, and looking out on the world with a lantern of wonder in your hand. And through all these varying pictures—may I not say it, sir?—I recognise the dignity and the pride of genius.

WILL. And after "The Tempest"?

POET. There is nothing after.

WILL. There is something which you do not know yet.

POET. What, sir?

WILL. The desire to forget it.

POET. To forget . . . ?

[*Enter* JUDITH, *left. She has just returned to the house and is in outdoor attire.*

JUDITH. [*Eagerly.*] Father! Father! [*Seeing a stranger, she draws back.*] Your pardon!

[*She is about to withdraw.*

The YOUNG POET *rises.*

WILL. Stay, Judith — [*Introducing her*] — My younger daughter—Signor Incognito.

POET. A daughter of Shakespeare! Where shall I find fit words?

WILL. The simplest were the best, for she is no poet and can neither read nor write. [*The* YOUNG POET *recoils in astonishment.*] All my care I bestowed upon children of another kind—children who in these days bring me no consolation. Only she—returning good for evil—has been my stay in a time of darkness.

[JUDITH *is now sitting on a stool at his feet.*

POET. [*Responsively.*] Cordelia!

WILL. Her name is Judith. She loves me a little, for all that I have sinned much.

JUDITH. Father!

WILL. Well, child?

JUDITH. I *must* say it—the gentleman will excuse me. Father, I have spoken with Tom. All will be well. He has given way wholly.

WILL. If so, he is wise.

JUDITH. And he writ you a letter, declaring his full submission. Oh, say you are glad!

WILL. Did he give you the letter?

JUDITH. Aye—here it is. [*She produces it from the bodice of her gown.*] Would you read it now—now?

POET. Maybe you would have me withdraw?

WILL. On the contrary. My sight is no longer clear and as my daughter is "no scholar," you would do me a service if you yourself would read it.

POET. To do so will be an honour!

[JUDITH *hands him the letter.*

POET. [*Reading.*]

"*Worthy Master Shakespeare,*

Having well considered the matter whereof we

did lately speak, and inasmuch as my affection for your daughter outruns the capacity of language, I have determined to comply in every jot with the wishes of her steemed father. Upon mine honour, therefore, and as being the son of your old friend and neighbour, I herewith pledge myself not to seek renown in the field of letters and to write no more verses. I promise that I will bend my wit resolutely to the trade by which I live, and will strive in all ways to be unto your daughter a gentle and loving husband. Moreover, in conformity with your express desire, I promise that, if ever I go to London, I will not set foot in a playhouse." . . .

[*The letter falls from the* YOUNG POET'S *fingers.*

WILL. [*To* JUDITH.] I am very glad. . . . And now, my dear, if you go into the garden you will find our good Master Collins. Tell him that we shall join you in a moment. . . . [*As she is about to go out, back.*] Nay, first inform your mother that this gentleman also will share our midday meal. [*Exit* JUDITH, *left.* SHAKESPEARE *approaches the* YOUNG POET, *who has relapsed into a chair, completely crushed.*] Well, sir—you have read your answer.

POET. Master Shakespeare, I am all amazement. Indeed, you have rent my heart.

WILL. There is that penalty in the possession of a heart. In one way or another, at one time or another, every heart, I think, must be rent.

POET. 'Twere better, then, to have none.

WILL. Not so. A little wisdom is worth a heavy price. Long since, not knowing the vanity of

ambition, I gave my whole heart to my writings. You, in your generosity, would recall them to me, but, like the hopes and hazards of a fruitless voyage, I wish now to remember them no more.

POET. Sir, sir, the sublimest works ever penned by man—and you wish to remember them no more!

WILL. That is perhaps my Nemesis.

POET. You believe in that cruel goddess?

WILL. So cruel she is not. For every man life has a lesson, a buried treasure, which he cannot find except by endurance and pain.

POET. Do not your works contain a myriad lessons? And will you take no measures to preserve them?

WILL. If they are of value to men, they will not perish.

POET. But have you no pride in them?

WILL. None—I thank God, none! I have learned my lesson. [*Enter* JUDITH, *back.*

JUDITH. Father—we have found some white violets!

WILL. Come, sir—you shall see my garden. In *that* I have some pride, for that is God's work. Ah, Master Collins!

[*He goes out, back, and joins* COLLINS, *who is visible through the window, left.*

[*The* YOUNG POET *is about to follow him but, dropping into a chair, buries his face in his hands.*

JUDITH. [*Standing at the open door, a little dismayed.*] Young master! Is anything amiss?

[*A brief pause.*

POET. [*Looking up, and speaking in a broken voice.*] You would not know the song.

JUDITH. What song, sir ?

POET. [*Reciting the words softly and upon two or three notes.*]

"Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

[*He rises unsteadily, and passes with* JUDITH *into the garden.*

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Name.	*Could be doubled with*
Philip Henslowe.	Burbage.
Christopher Marlowe.	A Young Poet.
A Poor Man.	Stage-keeper.
Joan Woodward.	
Edward Alleyne.	Collins.
William Shakespeare.	
The Dark Lady.	
John Heminges.	Ben Jonson.
Mr. W. H.	
Will Kemp.	
Stage-keeper of "The Globe."	A Poor Man.
Richard Burbage.	Henslowe.
Richard Robinson.	
Madame Montjoy.	
Ben Jonson.	Heminges.
Judith Shakespeare.	
Francis Collins.	Alleyne.
Anne Shakespeare.	
A Young Poet.	Marlowe.

The play can be performed by thirteen players.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

RECORDED FACTS, DEDUCTIONS, AND TRADITIONS RELEVANT TO THE PLAY.

1564 (*April*).	Shakespeare born at Stratford-on-Avon.
1582 (*December*).	He marries Anne Hathaway.
1583 (*May*).	Birth of a daughter, Susanna.
1585.	Birth of twin-children, Hamnet and Judith.
	Shakespeare prosecuted for deer stealing.
1586.	He migrates to London.
1586 (*To* 1592).	Years of theatrical 'prentice-work under Philip Henslowe

Episode One.

1592.	Henslowe builds and opens the Rose Theatre.
	Marlowe writes "Edward II" (subsequently produced by Henslowe).
	Shakespeare writes first version of "Love's Labour's Lost," his first play.

(1592 *contd.*)	Surviving portion of Henslowe's "Diary" begins. (Shakespeare's name does not appear.)
(*September*).	Greene dies, railing against his fellow-playwrights.
(*October*).	Edward Alleyne marries Joan Woodward and enters into partnership with her stepfather (Philip Henslowe).
*	* *
1593.	Marlowe killed in a brawl.
1593 (*And onwards*).	Shakespeare patronised by the nobility.
1593 (*To* 1602).	Periods of the Sonnets, indicating the relations to each other of Shakespeare, the Dark Lady and "Mr. W. H."
(*To* 1596).	Shakespeare lodges at St. Helens, Bishopsgate. (Thomas Morley, who set to music some of his songs, was a close neighbour.)

Episode Two.

1596.	Shakespeare works at "Romeo and Juliet."
(*August*).	Death of Hamnet Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon.
	Shakespeare revisits Stratford-on-Avon.

(1596 *contd.*)	He changes his London quarters, going to Southwark.
1597.	He purchases New Place, Stratford-on-Avon.
*	* *
1596 (*To* 1602).	Shakespeare's fame and material prosperity are established. The "War of the Poets"—Ben Jonson notably truculent. The Golden Age of the Mermaid Tavern, Bread Street, Cheapside.

Episode Three.

1602.	"Hamlet" produced at the Globe Theatre. Burbage "creates" *Hamlet;* Shakespeare plays the *Ghost;* Will Kemp the *First Grave-Digger.*
*	* *
1603	Death of Queen Elizabeth and accession of James I.
1603 (*To* 1608).	Orgy of corruption in Court and political circles. Shakespeare "layes" from time to time at the house of the Montjoys (Huguenot refugees), Silver Street, Cheapside.

Episode Four.

1608.	Shakespeare writes "Troilus and Cressida," then "Timon of Athens."
	Ben Jonson at the summit of his power.
	Shakespeare collaborates in "Pericles," creating the figure of "Marina."
	He withdraws more and more to Stratford-on-Avon.
(*December*).	John Milton born in Bread Street, Cheapside.
*	* *
1611.	Composition of "The Tempest," Shakespeare's last play.
1611 (*And onwards*).	Definite retirement to Stratford-on-Avon, and absorption in local interests.
1613.	Destruction of the Globe Theatre by fire.
1614.	A Puritan preacher entertained at New Place.

Episode Five.

1616.	Ben Jonson undertakes a folio edition of his own "works."
	Francis Collins drafts Shakespeare's last will. In its original form, it contains no

(1616 *contd.*)	reference to his wife or to his theatrical associations.
	Bequest to Judith of a "broad silver gilt bole."
	Some afterthoughts (interlineated): (*a*) provision for Judith's marriage-portion; (*b*) assurance of bequest to her of the silver bowl; (*c*) bequest of 26s. 8d. apiece to his "fellows" Heminges, Burbage and Condell, "to buy them rings"; (*d*) bequest to his wife of the second-best bed.
(*February* 10).	Judith marries Thomas Quiney, vintner and dilettante.
*	* *
(*April* 23).	Shakespeare's death.
1619.	Death of Burbage.
1623.	First folio given to the world by Heminges and Condell.

NOTE.—*Modesty betrays the* YOUNG POET *into the error of stating that he had writ nothing before Shakespeare left London. "The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street" was produced in* 1607.

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